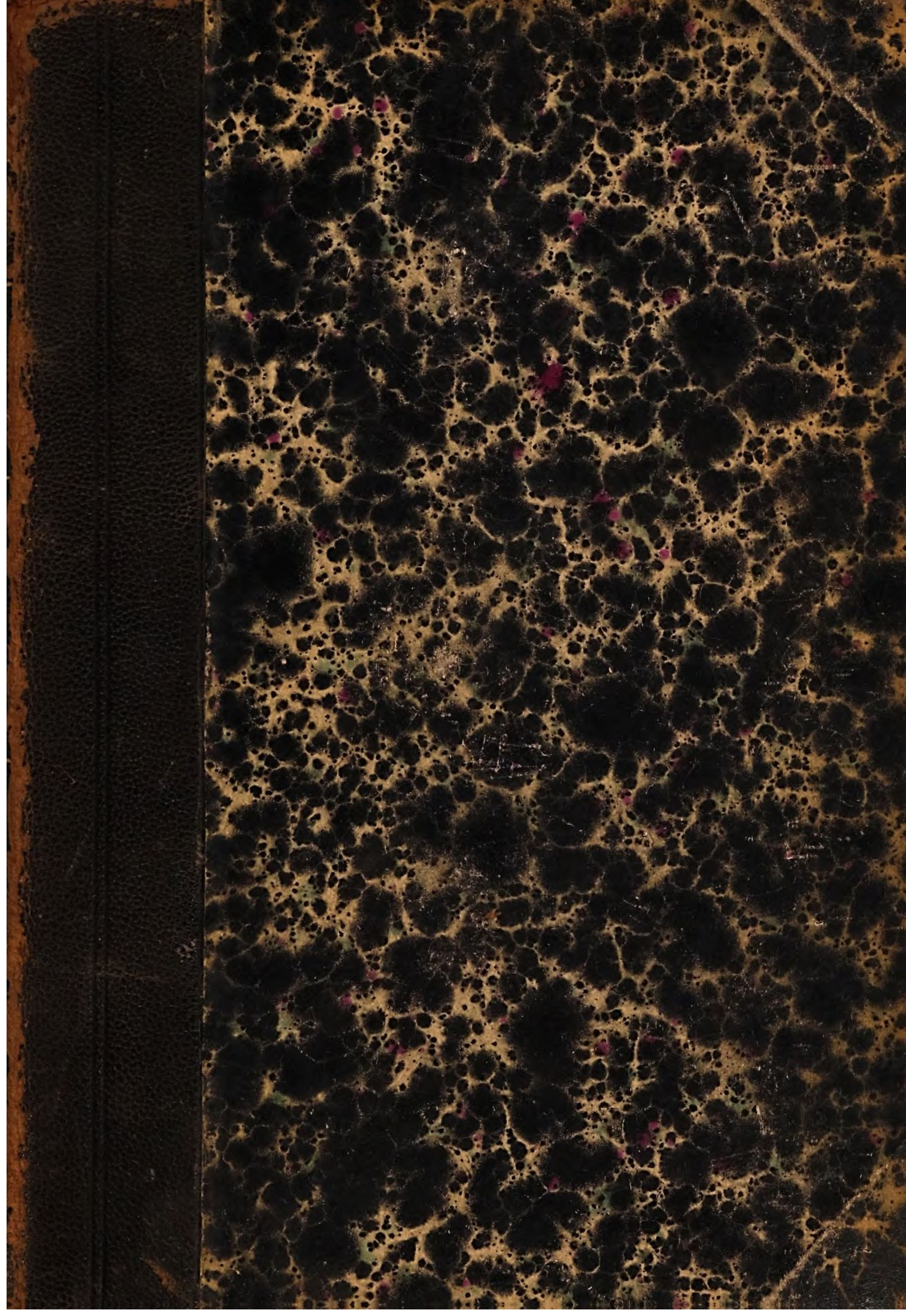




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MY LADY ROTHAS BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MY LADY ROTH A.

A ROMANCE.

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN,

AUTHOR OF

“THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF,” “A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE,”

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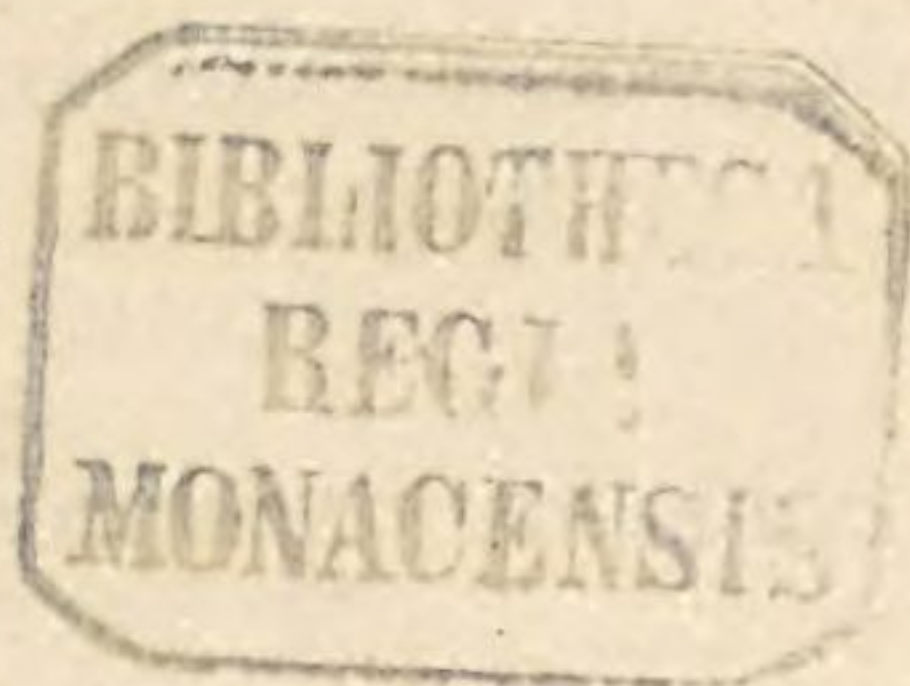
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1894.



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MY LADY ROTH A.

CHAPTER I.

HERITZBURG.

I NEVER saw anything more remarkable than the change which the death of my lady's uncle, Count Tilly, in the spring of 1632, worked at Heritzburg. Until the day when that news reached us, we went on in our quiet corner as if there were no war. We heard, and some of us believed, that the Palatine Elector, a good Calvinist like ourselves, had made himself King of Bohemia in the Emperor's teeth; and shortly afterwards—which we were much more ready to believe—that he was footing it among the Dutchmen. We heard that the King of Denmark had taken up his cause, but taken little by the motion; and then that the King of Sweden had made it his own. But these things affected us little: they were like the pattering of the storm to a man hugging himself by the fireside. Through all we lay snug and warm, and kept Christmas and drank the

Emperor's health. Even the great sack of Magdeburg, which was such an event as the world, I believe, will never see again, moved us less to fear than to pity; though the city lies something less than fifty leagues north-east of us. The reason of this I am going to tell you.

Our town stands, as all men know, in a nook of the Thuringian Forest, facing south and west towards Hesse, of which my Lady Rothä, Countess of Heritzburg, holds it, though all the land about is Saxon, belonging either to Coburg, or Weimar, or Altenburg, or the upper Duchy. On the north and east the forest rises in rolling black ridges, with a grey crag shooting up spire-like here and there; so that from this quarter it was not wonderful that no sound of war reached us. Toward the south and west, where is the mouth of the valley, and whither our people point when they talk of the world, a spur of the mountain runs down on either side to the Werra, which used to be crossed at this point by a wooden bridge. But this bridge was swept away by floods in the winter of 1624, and never repaired as long as the war lasted. Henceforth to come to Heritzburg travellers had to cross in old Joachim's boat, or if the river was very low, tuck up and take the chances. Unless they came by forest paths over the mountains.

Such a position favoured peace. Our friends could not easily trouble us; our allies were under no tempta-

tion to quarter troops upon us. For our enemies, we feared them even less. Against them we had a rampart higher than the mountains and wider than the Werra, in the name of Tilly. In those days the name of the great Walloon, victor in thirty fights, was a word to conjure with from the Tyrol to the Elbe. Mothers used it to scare their children, priests to blast their foes. His courage, his cruelty, and his zeal for the Roman Catholic Church combined to make him the terror of the Protestants! While his strange personality and misshapen form gave rise to a thousand legends, which men still tell by the fireside.

I think I see him now—as I did see him thrice in his lifetime—a meagre dwarfish man with a long face like a horse's face, and large whiskers. He dressed always in green satin, and wore a small high-peaked hat on his huge wrinkled forehead. A red feather drooped from it, and reached to his waist. At first sight one took him for a natural, for one of those strange monstrosities which princes keep to make them sport; but a single glance from his eyes sent simple men to their prayers, and cowed alike plain burgher and wild Croat. Few loved him, all feared him. I have heard it said that he had no shadow, but I can testify of my own knowledge and not merely for the honour of the family that this was false.

He was brother to my lady's mother, the Countess

Juliana. At the time of the match my late lord was thought to have disparaged his blood by mating with a Flemish lady of no more than gentle family. But as Count Tilly rose in the world first to be commander of the Bavarian armies and later to be Generalissimo of the forces of the Empire and a knight of the Golden Fleece, we heard less and less of this. The sneer lost its force until we became glad, Calvinists though we were, to lie secure under his shadow, and even felt a shamed pride in his prowess.

When my lord died early in the war, leaving the county of Heritzburg to his only child, the protection we derived in this way grew more and more valuable. We of Heritzburg, and we only, lost nothing by the war, except a parcel of idle fellows of whom more hereafter. Our cows came lowing to their stalls, our corn full weight to the granary. We slept more safely under the distaff than others under the sword; and all because my lady had the right to wear among her sixteen quarterings the coat of Tilly.

Some I know, but only since his death, have cried shame on us for accepting his protection. They profess to think that we should have shut our gates on the Butcher of Magdeburg, and bidden him do his worst. They say that the spirit of the old Protestants is dead within us, and that it is no wonder the cause lies languishing and Swedes alone fight single-eyed. But those

who say these things have seldom, I notice, corn or cows: and moreover, as I have hinted, they kept a very still tongue while Tilly lived.

There is our late Burgomaster, Hofman, for instance, he is given to talking after that fashion; and, it is true, he has plenty, though not so much since my lady fined him. But I well remember the last time Tilly visited us. It was after the fall of Magdeburg, and there was a shadow on his grim countenance, which men said never left it again until the day when the cannon-shot struck him in the ford of the Lech, and they carried him to Ingolstadt to die. As he rode under the arch by the Red Hart people looked strangely at him—for it was difficult to forget what he had done—as if, but for the Croats in the camp across the river, they would have torn him from his horse. But who, I pray you, so polite that day as Master Hofman? Who but he was first to hold the stirrup and cry, Hail? It was “My Lord Count,” this, and “My Lord Count” that, until the door closed on the crooked little figure and the great gold spurs. And then it was the same with the captain of the escort. Faugh! I grow sick when I think of such men, and know that they were the first to turn round and make trouble when the time came, and the old grey wolf was dead. For my part I have always been my lady’s man since I came out of the forest to serve her. It was enough for me that the

Count was her guest and of her kin. But for flattering him and putting myself forward to do him honour, I left that to the Hofmans.

However, the gloom we saw on Tilly's face proved truly to be the shadow of coming misfortune; for three weeks after he left us, was fought the great battle of Breitenfeld. Men say that the energy and decision he had shown all his life forsook him there; that he hesitated and suffered himself to be led by others, and that so it was from the day of Magdeburg to his death. This may be true, I think, for he had the blood of women and children on his head; or it may be that at last he met a foeman worthy of his steel. But in either case the news of the Swede's victory rang through North Germany like a trumpet call. It broke with startling abruptness the spell of victory which had hitherto—for thirteen long years—graced the Emperor's flag and the Roman Church. In Hesse, to the west of us, where the Landgrave William had been the first of all German Princes to throw in his lot with the Swedes and defy the Emperor, it awoke such a shout of jubilation and vengeance as crossed even the Werra; while from the Saxon lands to the east of us, which this victory saved from spoliation and punishment, came an answering cry of thankfulness and joy. Even in Heritzburg it stirred our blood. It roused new thoughts and new ambitions. We were Protestants; we were of the

north. Those who had fought and won were our brethren.

And this was right. Nor for a time did I see anything wrong or any sign of mischief brewing, though tongues in the town wagged more freely, as the cloud of war rolled ever southward and away from us. I saw nothing amiss until the news of Count Tilly's death reached us six months later. Then, or it might be a fortnight afterwards—so long I think respect for my lady's loss and the new hatchment restrained the good-for-naughts—the trouble began. How it arose, and what shape it took, and how I came athwart it, I am going to tell you without further preface.

It was about the third Monday in May of that year, 1632. A broken lock in one of the rooms at the castle had baffled the skill of our smith, and about nightfall, thinking to take a cup of beer at the Red Hart on my way back, I went down to Peter the locksmith's in the town. His forge stands in the winding lane, which joins the High Street at the Red Hart, after running half round the town inside the wall; so that one errand was a fair excuse for the other. When I had given him his order and come out again, I found that what with the darkness of the lane and the blaze of his fire which had got into my eyes, I could not see a yard before me. A little fine rain was falling with a chilly east wind, and the town seemed dead. The pavement

felt greasy under foot, and gave out a rank smell. However, I thought of the cheery kitchen at the Red Hart and stumbled along as fast as I could, until turning a corner I came in sight of the lanthorn which hangs over the entrance to the lane.

But short of this, something took my eye: a warm stream of light, which shone across the path, and fell brightly on the rough surface of the town-wall. It came from a small window on my left. I had to pass close beside this window, and out of curiosity I looked in. What I saw was so surprising that I stopped to look again.

The room inside was low and small and bare, with an earthen floor and no fireplace. On a ragged pallet in one corner lay an elderly man, to whose wasted face and pallid cheeks a long white moustache, which strayed over the coverlet, gave an air of incongruous fierceness. His bright eyes were fixed on the door as if he were listening. A child, three or four years old, sat on the floor beside him, playing with a yellow cat.

It was neither of these figures, however, which held my gaze, but that of a young girl who knelt on the floor near the head of the bed. A little crucifix stood propped against the wall before her, and she had a string of beads in her hands. Her face was turned from me, but I felt that her lips were moving. I had never seen a Romanist at prayer before, and I lingered

a moment, thinking in the first place that she would have done better had she swung the shutter against the window, and in the next, that with her dark hair hanging about her neck and her head bent devoutly, she looked so weak and fragile that the stoutest Protestant could scarcely have found it in his heart to harm her.

Suddenly a noise, which dully reached me where I stood outside the casement, caused her to start in alarm, and turn her head. At the same moment the cat sprang away affrighted, and the man on the bed stirred and tried, as it seemed to me, to rise. This breaking the spell, I stole quietly away and went round the corner to the door of the inn.

Though I had never considered the girl so closely before, I knew who she was. Some eight months earlier, when Tilly, hard pressed by the King of Sweden, was striving to keep down Saxony with one hand, and Hesse with the other, the man on the pallet, Stephen Wort, a sergeant of Jägers, had been wounded in a skirmish beyond the river. Why Tilly, who was used to seeing men die round him like flies in winter, gave a second thought to this man more than to others, I cannot say even now. But for some reason, when he visited us before Breitenfeld, he brought the wounded sergeant in his train, and when he went left him at the inn. Some said that the man had saved his life, others that the two were born on the same day and

shared the same horoscope. Probably Tilly knew nothing of the man, and the captain of the escort was the active party. I imagine he had a kindness for Wort, and knowing that outside our little valley a wounded man of Tilly's army would have as short shrift as a hamstrung wolf, took occasion to leave him with us.

I thought of all this as I stood fumbling about the door for the great bell. The times were such that even inns shut their doors at night, and I had to wait and blow on my fingers—for no wind is colder than a May wind—until I was admitted. Inside, however, the blazing fire and cheerful kitchen with its show of gleaming pewter, and its great polished settles winking solemnly in the heat, made amends for all. I forgot the wounded man and his daughter and the fog outside. There were eight or nine men present, among them Hofman, who was then Burgomaster, Dietz, the town minister, and Klink our host.

They were people I met every day, and sometimes more than once a day, and they greeted me with a silent nod. The lad who waited brought me a cup of beer, and I said that the night was cold for the time of year. Some one assented, but the company generally sat silent, sagely sucking their lips, or exchanging glances which seemed to indicate a secret understanding.

I was not slow to see that this had to do with me

and that my entrance had cut short some jest or story. I waited patiently to learn what it was, and presently I was enlightened. After a few minutes Klink the host rose from his seat. First looking from one to another of his neighbours, as if to assure himself of their sympathy, he stole quietly across the kitchen to a door which stood in one corner. Here he paused a moment listening, and then on a sudden struck the door a couple of blows, which made the pewters ring again.

“Hi! Within there!” he cried in his great voice. “Are you packing? Are you packing, wench? Because out you go to-morrow, pack or no pack! Out you go, do you hear?”

He stood a moment waiting for an answer, but seemed to get none, on which he came back to his seat, and chuckling fatly to himself, looked round on his neighbours for applause. One winked and another rubbed his calves. The greater number eyed the fire with a sly smile. For my part I was slow of apprehension. I did not understand but waited to hear more.

For five minutes we all sat silent sucking our lips. Then Klink rose again with a knowing look, and crossed the kitchen on tiptoe with the same parade of caution as before. Bang! He struck the door until it rattled on its hinges.

“Hi! You there!” he thundered. “Do you hear, you jade? Are you packing? Are you packing, I say?”

Because pack or no pack, to-morrow you go! I am a man of my word."

He did not wait this time for an answer, but came back to us with a self-satisfied grin on his face. He drank some beer—he was a big, ponderous man with a red face and small pig's eyes—and pointed over his shoulders with the cup. "Eh?" he said, raising his eye-brows.

"Good!" a man growled who sat opposite to him.

"Quite right!" said a second in the same tone. "Popish baggage!"

Hofman said nothing, but nodded, with a sly glance at me. Dietz the Minister nodded curtly also, and looked hard at the fire. The rest laughed.

But for my part I felt very little like laughing. When I considered that this clumsy jest was being played at the expense of the poor girl, whom I had seen at her prayers, and that likely enough it was being played for the tenth time—when I reflected that these heavy fellows were sitting at their ease by this great fire watching the logs blaze and the ruddy light flicker up the chimney, while she sat in cold and discomfort, fearing every sound and trembling at every whisper, I could have found it in my heart to get up and say what I thought of it. And my speech would have astonished them. But I remembered, in time, that least said is soonest mended, and that after all

words break no bones, and I did no more than sniff and shrug my shoulders.

Klink, however, chose to take offence in his stupid fashion. "Eh?" he said. "You are of another mind, Master Schwartz?"

"What is the good of talking like that," I said, "when you do not mean it?"

He puffed himself out, and after staring at me for a time, answered slowly: "But what if I do mean it, Master Steward? What if I do mean it?" he repeated.

"You don't!" I said. "The man pays his way."

I thought to end the matter with that. I found that it was not to be disposed of so easily. For a moment indeed no one answered me. We are a slow speaking race, and love to have time to think. A minute had not elapsed however before one of the men who had spoken earlier took up the cudgels. "Ay, he pays his way," he said, thrusting his head forward. "He pays his way, master; but how? Tell me that."

I did not answer him.

"Out of the peasant's pocket!" the fellow replied viciously. "Out of the plunder and booty of Magdeburg. With blood-money, master."

"I only ask to meet one of his kind in the fields," the man sitting next him, who had also spoken before, continued with meaning. "With no one looking on, master. There would be one less wolf in the world, I

would answer for that. He pays his way? Oh, yes, he pays it here."

I thought a shrug of the shoulders a sufficient answer. These two belonged to the company my lady had raised in the preceding year to serve with the Landgrave according to her tenure. They had come back to the town a week before this with money to spend; some people saying that they had deserted, and some that they had returned to raise volunteers. Either way I was not surprised to find them a little bit above themselves; for foreign service spoils the best, and these had never been anything but loiterers and vagrants, whom it angered me to see on a bench cheek by jowl with the Burgomaster. I thought to treat them with silent contempt. But I soon found that they did not stand alone.

The Minister was the first to come to their support. "You forget that these people are Papists, Master Schwartz. Rank Roman Papists," he said.

"So was Tilly!" I retorted, stung to anger. "Yet you managed to do with him."

"That was different," he answered sourly; but he winced.

Then Hofman began on me. "You see, Master Steward," he said slowly, "we are a Protestant town—we are a Protestant town. And it ill beseems us—it ill beseems us to harbour Papists. I have thought over that a long while. And now I think it is time to rid

ourselves of them—to abate the nuisance in fact. You see we are a Protestant town, Master Schwartz. You forget that.”

“Then were we not a Protestant town,” I cried, jumping up in a rage, and forgetting all my discretion, “when we entertained Count Tilly? When you held his stirrup, Burgomaster? and you, Master Dietz, uncovered to him? Were not these people Papists when they came here, and when you received them? But I will tell you what it is,” I continued, looking round scornfully, and giving my anger vent, for such meanness disgusted me. “When there was a Bavarian army across the river, and you could get anything out of Tilly, you were ready to oblige him, and clean his boots. You could take in Romanists then, but now that he is dead and your side is uppermost, you grow scrupulous. Pah! I am ashamed of you! You are only fit to bully children and girls, and such like!” and I turned away to take up my iron-shod staff.

They were all very red in the face by this time, and the two soldiers were on their feet. But the Burgomaster restrained them. “Fine words!” he said, puffing out his cheeks—“fine words! Dare say the girl can hear him. But let him be, let him be—let him have his say!”

“There is some one else will have a say in the matter, Master Hofman!” I retorted warmly, as I turned to the

door, "and that is my lady. I would advise you to think twice before you act. That is all!"

"Hoop-de-doo-dem-doo!" cried one in derision, and others echoed it. But I did not stay to hear, I turned a deaf ear to the uproar, wherein all seemed to be crying after me at once, and shrugging my shoulders I opened the door and went out.

The sudden change from the warm noisy kitchen to the cold night air sobered me in a moment. As I climbed the dark slippery street which rises to the foot of the castle steps, I began to wish I had let the matter be. After all, what call had I to interfere, and make bad blood between myself and my neighbours? It was no business of mine. The three were Romanists. Doubtless the man had robbed and hectored in his time, and while his hand was strong; and now he suffered as others had suffered.

It was ten chances to one the Burgomaster would carry the matter to my lady in some shape or other, and the minister would back him up, and I should be reprimanded; or if the Countess saw with my eyes, and sent them off with a flea in their ears, then we should have all the rabble of the town who were at Klink's beck and call, going up and down making mischief, and crying "No Popery!" Either way I foresaw trouble, and wished I had let the matter be, or better still had kept away that night from the Red Hart.

But then on a sudden there rose before me, just as plainly as if I had still been looking through the window, a vision of the half-lit room looking on the lane, with the sick man on the pallet, and the slender figure kneeling beside the bed. I saw the cat jump again, saw again the girl's frightened gesture as she turned towards the door, and I grew almost as hot as I had been in the kitchen. "The cowards!" I muttered—"the cowards! But I will be beforehand with them, I will go to my lady early and tell her all."

You see I had my misgivings, but I little thought what that evening was really to bring forth, or that I had done that in the Red Hart kitchen which would alter all my life, and all my lady's life; and spreading still, as a little crack in ice will spread from bank to bank, would leave scarce a man in Heritzburg unchanged, and scarce a woman's fate untouched.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNTESS ROTH.

My Lady Rotha, Countess of Heritzburg in her own right, was at this time twenty-five years old and unmarried. Her maiden state, which seems to call for explanation, I attribute to two things. Partly to the influence of her friend and companion Fräulein Anna Max

of Utrecht, who was reputed in the castle to know seven languages, and to consider marriage a sacrifice, and partly to the Countess's own disposition, which led her to set a high value on the power and possessions which had descended to her from her father. Count Tilly's protection, which had exempted Heritzburg from the evils of the war, had rendered the support of a husband less necessary; and so she had been left to follow her own will in the matter, and was now little likely to surrender her independence unless her heart went with the gift.

Not that suitors were lacking, for my lady, besides her wealth, was possessed of the handsomest figure in the world, with beautiful features, and the most gracious and winning address ever known. I remember as if it were yesterday Prince Albert of Rammingen, a great match but an old man. He came in his chariot with a numerous retinue, and stayed long, taking it very hardly that my lady was not to be won; but after a while he went. His place was taken by Count Frederick, a brother of the Margrave of Anspach, a young gentleman who had received his education in France, and was full of airs and graces, going sober to bed every night, and speaking German with a French accent. Him my lady soon sent about his business. The next was a more famous man, Count Thurn of Bohemia, he who began the war by throwing Slawata and Martinitz out of window

in Prague, in '19, and paid for it by fifteen years of exile. He wore such an air of mystery, and had such tales to tell of flight and battle and hair-breadth 'scapes, that he was scarcely less an object of curiosity in the town than Tilly himself; but he knelt in vain. And in fine so it was with them all. My lady would have none of them, but kept her maiden state and governed Heritzburg and saw the years go by, content to all appearance with Fräulein Anna and her talk, which was all of Voetius and Beza and scores of other learned men, whose names I could never remember from one hour to another.

It was my duty to wait upon her every day after morning service, and receive her orders, and inform her of anything I thought she ought to know. At that hour she was to be found in her parlour, a long room on the first floor of the castle, lighted by three deeply-recessed windows and hung with old tapestry worked by her great-grandmother in the dark days of the Emperor Charles, when the Count of Heritzburg shared the imprisonment of the good Landgrave of Hesse. A screen stood a little way within the door, and behind this it was my business to wait, until I was called.

On this morning, however, I had no patience to wait, and I made myself so objectionable by my constant coughing that at last she cried, with a cheerful laugh, "What is it, Martin? Come and tell me. Has there

been a fire in the forest? But it is not the right time of year for that?"

"No, my lady," I said, going forward. And then out of shyness or sheer contradictoriness I found myself giving her the usual report of this and that and the other, but never a word of what was in my mind. She sat, according to her custom in summer, in the recess of the farthest window, while Fräulein Anna occupied a stool placed before a reading-desk. Behind the two the great window gave upon the valley. By merely turning the head either of them could look over the red roofs of Heritzburg to the green plain, which here was tolerably wide, and beyond that again to the dark line of forest, which in spring and autumn showed as blue to the eye as thick wood smoke.

While I spoke my lady toyed with a book she had been reading, and Fräulein Anna turned over the pages on the desk with an impatient hand, sometimes looking at my lady and sometimes tapping with her foot on the floor. She was plump and fair and short, dressing plainly, and always looking into the distance; whether because she thought much and on deep matters, or because, as the Countess's woman once told me, she could see nothing beyond the length of her arm, I cannot say. When I had finished my report and paused, she looked up at my lady and said, "Now, Rothä, are you ready?"

"Not quite, Anna," my lady answered, smiling. "Martin has not done yet."

"He tells in ten minutes what another would in five," Fräulein said crossly. "But to finish?"

"Yes, Martin, what is it?" my lady assented. "We have eaten all the pastry. The meat I am sure is yet to come."

I saw there was nothing else for it, and after all it was what I had come to do. "Your excellency knows the Bavarian soldier and his daughter, who have been lodging these six months past at the Red Hart?" I blurted out.

"To be sure."

"Klink talks of turning them out," I muttered, feeling my face grow red I scarcely knew why.

"Is their money at an end?" my lady asked shrewdly. She was a great woman of business.

"No," I answered, "but I dare say it is low."

"Then what is the matter?" my lady continued, looking at me somewhat curiously, so that I grew warmer than ever.

"He says they are Papists," I answered. "And it is true, as your excellency knows, but it is not for him to say it. The man will not be safe for an hour outside the walls, nor the girl much longer. And there is a small child besides. And they have no where else to go."

My lady's face grew grave while she listened. When I stopped speaking she rose and stood fronting me, tapping on the reading-desk with her fingers. "This must not be allowed, Martin," she said firmly. "You were right to tell me."

"Master Hofman and the Minister——"

"Yes," she interposed, nodding quickly. "Go to them. They will see Klink, and——"

"They are just pushing him on, my lady," I said, with a groan.

"What!" she cried; and I remember to this day how her grey eyes flashed and how she threw back her head in generous amazement. "Do you mean to say that this is being done in spite, Martin? That after escaping all the perils of this wretched war these men are so thankless as to turn on the first scape-goat that falls into their hands? It is not possible!"

"It looks like it, my lady," I muttered, wondering whether I had not perhaps carried the matter too far.

"No, no," she said, shaking her head, "you must have made a mistake; but go to Klink. Go to Klink and tell him from me to keep the man for a week at least. I will be answerable for the cost, and we can consider in the meantime what to do. My cousin the Waldgrave Rupert visits me in a day or two, and I will consult him."

Still I did not like to go without giving her a hint

that she might meet with opposition, and I hesitated, considering how I might warn her without causing needless alarm or seeming to presume. Fräulein Anna, who had listened throughout with the greatest impatience, took advantage of the pause to interfere. "Come, Rotha," she said. "Enough trifling. Let us go back to Voetius and our day's work."

"My dear," my lady answered somewhat coldly, "this is my day's work. I am trying to do it."

"Your work is to improve and store your mind," Fräulein Anna retorted with peevishness.

"True, but for a purpose," my lady said quietly.

"There can be no purpose higher than the acquirement of philosophy—and religion," Fräulein Anna said with confidence. Her last words sounded like an afterthought.

My lady shook her head. "The duty of a Princess is to govern," she said.

"How can she govern unless she has prepared her mind by study and thought?" Fräulein Anna asked triumphantly.

"I agree within limits," my lady answered. "But——"

"There is no *but*! Nor are there any limits that I see!" the other rejoined eagerly. "Let me read to you out of Voetius himself. In his maxims——"

"Not this minute," the Countess answered firmly.

And thereby she interrupted not Fräulein Anna alone but a calculation on which without any light from Voetius I was engaged; namely, how long it would take a man to mow an acre of ground if he spent all his time in sharpening his scythe! Low matters of that kind however have nothing in common with philosophy I suppose; and my lady's voice soon brought me back to the point. "What is it you want to say, Martin?" she asked. "I see you have something still on your mind."

"I wish your excellency to be aware that there may be a good deal of feeling in the town on this matter," I said.

"You mean that I may make myself unpopular," she answered.

That was what I did mean—that at the least. And I bowed.

My lady shook her head with a grave smile. "I might give you an answer from Voetius, Martin," she said; "that they who govern are created to protect the weak against the strong. And if not, *cui bono?* But that, you may not understand. Shall I say then instead that I, and not Hofman or Dietz, am Countess of Heritzburg."

"My lady," I cried—and I could have knelt before her—"that is answer enough for me!"

"Then go," she said, her face bright, "and do as I told you."

She turned away, and I made my reverence and went out and down the stairs and through the great court with my head high and my heart high also. I might not understand Voetius; but I understood that my lady was one, who in face of all and in spite of all, come Hofman or Dietz, come peace or war, would not blench, but stand by the right! And it did me good. He is a bad horse that will not jump when his rider's heart is right, and a bad servant that will not follow when his master goes before! I hummed a tune, I rattled my staff on the stones. I said to myself it was a thousand pities so gallant a spirit should be wasted on a woman: and then again I fancied I could not have served a man as I knew I could and would serve her should time and the call ever put me to the test.

The castle at Heritzburg, rising abruptly above the roofs of the houses, is accessible from the town only by a flight of steps cut in the rock. On the other three sides the knob on which it stands is separated from the wooded hills in the rear by a narrow ravine, which is crossed in one place by a light horse-bridge made in modern days. This forms the chief entrance to the castle, but the road which leads to it from the town goes so far round that it is seldom used, the flight of steps I have mentioned leading at once and more conveniently from the end of the High Street. Half way down the High Street on the right hand side is the

Market-place, a small paved square, shaded by tall wooden houses, and having a carved stone pump in the middle. A hundred paces beyond this on the same side is the Red Hart, standing just within the West Gate.

From one end of the town to the other is scarcely a step, and I was at the inn before the Countess's voice had ceased to sound in my ears. The door stood open, and I went in, expecting to find the kitchen empty or nearly so at that hour of the day. To my surprise, I found at least a dozen people in it, with as much noise and excitement going forward as if the yearly fair had been in progress. For a moment I was not observed. I had time to see who were present—Klink, the two soldiers who had put themselves forward the evening before, and half a score of idlers. Then the landlord's eye fell on me and he seemed to pass the word. A sudden silence followed and a dozen faces turned my way; so that the room, which was low in the roof with wide low windows, seemed to lighten.

"Just in time, Master Schwartz!" cried one fellow insolently. "You can write, and we are just about a petition! Perhaps you will draw it up for us."

"A petition," I said shortly, eyeing the fellow with contempt. "What petition?"

"Against Papists!" he answered boldly.

"And favourers, aiders, and abettors!" exclaimed one in the background.

"Master Klink, Master Klink," I said, trying to frown down the crowd, "you would do well to have a care. These ragamuffins——"

"Have a care yourself, Master Jackanapes!" the same voice cried. "This is a town meeting."

"Town meeting!" I said, looking round contemptuously. "Gaol-meeting, you mean, and likely to be a gaol-filling. But I do not speak to you; I leave that to the constable. For Master Klink, if he will take a word of advice, well and good, I will speak with him alone."

They cried out to him not to speak to me. But Klink had still sense enough to know that he might be going too fast, and though they hooted and laughed at him—being for the most part people who had nothing to lose—he came out of the house with me and crossed the street that we might talk unheard. As civilly as I could I delivered my message; and as exactly, for I saw that the issue might be serious.

I was not surprised when he groaned, and in a kind of a tremor shook his hands. "I am not my own master, Schwartz," he said. "And that is the truth."

"You were your own master last night," I retorted.

"These fellows are all for 'No Popery.'"

"Ay, and who gave them the cue?" I said sharply. "It is not the first time the fat burgher has raised the lean kine and been eaten by them. It serves you right."

"I am willing enough to do what my lady wishes," he whimpered; "but——"

"But you are not master of your own house, do you mean?" I exclaimed. "Then fetch the constable. That is simple. Or the Burgomaster."

"Hush!" he said, "he is hotter than any one."

"Then," I answered flatly, "he had better cool, and you too. That is all I have to say. And mark me, Klink," I continued sternly, "see that no harm happens to that girl or her father. They are in your house, and you have heard what my lady says. Let those ruffians interfere with them and you will be held to answer for it."

"That is easy talking," he muttered peevishly; "but if I cannot help it?"

"You will have to help it!" I rejoined, losing my temper a little. "You were fool enough, or I am much mistaken, to set a light to this stack, and now you will have to smother the flame, or pay for it. That is all, my friend. You have had fair warning. The rest is in your own hands."

And with that I left him. He was a stupid man but a sly one too, and I doubted his sincerity, or I might have taken another way with him. In the end doubtless it would have been the same.

As I turned on my heel to go, the troop round the door raised a kind of hoot; and this pursued me as I

went up the street, bringing the blood to my cheeks and almost provoking me to return. I checked the impulse however, and strode on as if I did not hear; and by the time I reached the market-place the cry had ceased. Here however it began afresh; a number of loose fellows and lads who were loafing about the stalls crying "No Popery!" and "Popish Schwartz!" as I passed, in a way which showed that the thing was premeditated and they had been lying in wait for me. I stopped and scowled at them, and for a moment they ceased. But the instant my back was turned the hooting began again—with an ugly savage note in it—and I had not got quite clear of the place when some one flung a bundle of carrots, which hit me sharply on the back. I swung round in a rage at that, and dashed hot foot into the middle of the stalls in the hope of catching the fellow. But I was too late. An old woman over whom I fell was the only sufferer. The rascals had fled down an alley, and, contenting myself with crying after them that they were a set of cowards, I set the old lady on her legs, and went sullenly on my way.

But I had my thoughts. Such an insult had not been offered me since I first came to the town to serve my lady, and it filled me with indignation. It seemed besides not a thing to be sneezed at. I took it for a sign of change, of bad times coming. Moreover—and

this troubled me as much as anything—I had recognised among the fellows in the square two more of the fifty men my lady had sent to serve with Hesse. There seemed ground for fearing that a number had deserted and come back in a body and were in hiding. If this were so, and the Burgomaster, instead of repressing, encouraged their excesses, they were likely to prove a source of trouble and danger—real danger.

I paused on the steps leading up to the castle, in two minds whether I should not go to the Burgomaster and tell him plainly what I thought; for I felt the responsibility. My lady had no male protector, no higher servant than myself, and we had not a dozen capable men in the castle. The Landgrave of Hesse, our over-lord, was away with his troops with the King of Sweden and we could expect no immediate support from him. In the event of a riot in the town therefore—and I knew that, in the great Peasants' War of a century before, our town had been rebellious enough—we should be practically helpless. An hour and a little ill-fortune might place my lady in the hands of her mutinous subjects; and though the Landgrave would be certain sooner or later to chastise them, many things might happen in the interval.

In the end I went on up the steps, thinking I had better leave Hofman alone, since I could not trust him, and should only by applying to him disclose our weak-

ness. There was a way indeed which occurred to me as I reached the head of the stairs, but I had not taken two steps across the terrace, as we call that part of the court which overlooks the town, before it was immediately driven out again. Fräulein Max was walking up and down with a book, sunning herself. I think she had been watching for me, for the moment I appeared she called to me.

I went up to her reluctantly. I was anxious and in no mood to listen to one of those learned disquisitions with which she would sometimes favour us, without any thought apparently whether we understood her or no. But this I soon found was not what I had to fear. Her face wore a frown and her tone was peevish; but she had shut up her book, keeping her place in it with her finger.

"Master Martin," she said, peering at me with her short-sighted eyes, "you are a very foolish man, I think."

"Fräulein!" I muttered in surprise. What did she mean?

"A very foolish one!" she repeated angrily. "Why are you disturbing your lady? Why do you not leave her to her studies and her peace instead of distracting her mind with these stories of a man and a girl? A man and a girl, and Papists! Piff! What are they to us? Don't you understand that your lady has higher work and something else to do? Go you and look after your man and girl."

"But my lady's subjects, Fräulein——"

"Her subjects?" she replied, almost violently. "Papists are no subjects. Or to what purpose the *Cujus Regio?* But what do you know of government? You have heard and you repeat."

"But, Fräulein," I said humbly, for her way of talking made me seem altogether in the wrong, and a monster of indiscretion, "if my lady does not interfere, the man and the girl you speak of will suffer. That is clear."

She snapped her fingers.

"Piff!" she cried, screwing up her eyes still more. "What has that to do with us? Is there not suffering going on from one end of Germany to the other? Do not scores die every day? Can we prevent it? No. Then why trouble us for this one little, little matter? It is theirs to suffer, and ours to think and read, and learn and write. We were at peace to do all this, and then you come with your man and girl, and the peace is gone!"

"But, Fräulein——"

"You do no good by saying Fräulein, Fräulein!" she replied sharply. "Look at things in the light of reason. Trouble us no more. That is what you have got to do. What are this man and girl to you that you should endanger your mistress for their sakes?"

"They are nothing to me," I answered.

"Then let them go!" she replied with suppressed passion. "And undo your folly the best way you can, and the sooner the better! Chut! That when the mind is set on higher things it should be distracted by such mean and miserable objects! If they are nothing to you, why in heaven's name obtrude them on us?"

After that she would not hear another word, but dismissed me with a wave of her hand as if the thing were fully settled and over, burying herself in her book and turning away; while I went into the house with my tail between my legs and all my doubts and misgivings increased a hundredfold. For this which she had put into words was the very thought, the very way out of it, which had occurred to me! I had only to let the matter drop, I had only to leave these people to their fate, and the danger and difficulty were at once at an end. For the moment my lady's authority might suffer perhaps, but at the proper season, when the Landgrave was at home and could help us, we could cheaply assert and confirm it.

All that day I went about in doubt what I should do; and night came without resolving my perplexities. At one moment I thought of my duty to my lady, and the calamities in which I might involve her. At another I pictured the girl I had seen praying by her father's bed—pictured her alone and defenceless, hourly insulted by Klink, and with terror and uncertainty loom-

ing each day larger before her eyes; or, worse still, abandoned to all the dangers which awaited her, in the event of the town refusing her shelter. Considering I had seen her once only—to notice her—it was wonderful how clearly I remembered her.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURGOMASTER'S DEMAND.

As it turned out, the other party took the burden of decision off my shoulders. When I came out of chapel next morning, I found Hofman on the terrace waiting for me, and with him Master Dietz wearing his Geneva gown and a sour face. They wished to see my lady. I said it was early yet, and tried to hold them in talk that I might learn what they would be at. But they repulsed my advances, said they knew her excellency always transacted her business at this hour—which was perfectly true—and at last sent me to the parlour whether I would or no.

Under such circumstances I did not linger behind the screen, but advanced at once, and interrupting Fräulein Max, who had just begun to read aloud, while my lady worked, said that the Burgomaster desired the honour of an interview with the Countess.

My lady passed her needle once through the stuff,

and then looked up. "Do you know what he wants, Martin?" she said in a quiet tone.

I said I did not.

She bent her head and worked for a moment in silence. Then she sighed gently, and without looking up, nodded to me. "Very well, I will see him here," she said. "But first send Grissel and Gretchen to wait on me. Let Franz bring two stools and place them, and bid him and Ernst keep the door. My footstool also. And let the two Jacobs wait in the hall below."

I gave the orders and took on myself to place two extra lackeys in the hall that we might not seem to be short of men. Then I went to the Burgomaster, and attended him and Master Dietz to the parlour.

They bowed three times according to custom as they advanced, and my lady, taking one step forward, gave her hand to the Burgomaster to kiss. Then she stepped back and sat down, looking with a pleasant face at the Minister. "I would fain apologise for troubling your excellency," the Mayor began slowly and heavily. "But the times are trying."

"Your presence needs no apology, Master Hofman," my lady answered, smiling frankly. "It is your right to see me on behalf of the town at all times. It would grieve me much, if you did not sometimes exercise the privilege. And for Master Dietz, who may be able to assist us, I am right glad to see him also."

The Minister bowed low. The Burgomaster only puffed out his cheeks. Doubtless he felt that courage at the Red Hart and courage in my lady's parlour were two different things. But it was too late to retreat, for the Minister was there to report what passed; and after a glance at Dietz's face he proceeded. "I am not here in a private capacity, if it please your excellency," he said. "And I beg your excellency to bear this in mind. I am here as Burgomaster, having the peace of the town on my mind; which at present is endangered—very greatly endangered," he repeated pompously.

"I am sorry to hear that," my lady answered.

"Nevertheless it is so," he replied with a kind of obstinacy. "Endangered by the presence of certain persons in the town, whose manners are not comformable. These persons are Papists, and the town, your excellency doubtless remembers, is a Protestant town."

"Certainly I remember that," my lady said gravely.

"And hence of this combination your excellency will understand comes a likelihood of evil," he continued. "On which, hearing you took an interest in these persons, however little deserved, it seemed to be my duty to lay the matter before you."

"You have done very rightly," my lady answered quietly. "Do I understand then, Master Hofman, that the Papists you complain of are conspiring to break the peace of the town?"

The Burgomaster gasped. He was too obtuse to see at once that my lady was playing with him. He only wondered how he had managed to convey so strange a notion to her mind. He hastened to set her right. "No—oh, no," he said. "There is no fear of that. There are but three of them."

"Are they presuming to perform their rites in public then?" my lady rejoined. "If so, of course it cannot be permitted. It is against the law of the town."

"No," he answered, more slowly and more reluctantly as the drift of her questions began to dawn upon him. "I do not know that that is so. I have not heard that it is so. But they are Papists."

"Well, but with their consciences we have nothing to do!" the Countess said more sharply. "I confess, I fail as yet to see, Master Hofman, how they threaten the peace of the town."

The Burgomaster stared. "I do not know that they threaten it themselves," he said slowly. "But their presence stirs up the people, if your excellency understands; and will lead, if the matter goes on, to a riot or worse."

"Ha! Now I comprehend!" my lady cried in a hearty tone. "You fear your constables may be scarcely equal to coping with the rabble?"

He admitted that that was so.

"And you desire such assistance as I can offer to-

wards maintaining the law and protecting these persons; who have of course a right to protection?"

Master Hofman began to see whither he had been led, and glared at the Countess with his mouth wide open. But for the moment he could not find a word to say. Never did I see a man look more at a loss.

"Well, I must consider," my lady resumed thoughtfully, her finger to her cheek. "But rest assured, you shall be supported. Martin," she continued, turning to me, "let word be sent to the four foresters at Gatz to come down to the castle this evening. And send also to the charcoal-burners' camp. How many men should there be in it?"

"Some half-score, my lady," I answered, adding two-thirds to the truth.

"Ah? And let the huntsman come down and bring a couple of feeders. Doubtless with our own men, we shall be able to place a score or thirty at your disposal, Master Hofman, and stout fellows. These, with your constables and such of the peaceful burghers as you see fit to call to your assistance, should be amply sufficient to quell the disorderly."

I could have laughed aloud, Master Hofman looked so confounded. Never man had an air of being more completely taken aback. By offering her help to put down any mob which might rise, the Countess had deprived him of the plea he had come to prefer; that

he was afraid he could not answer for the safety of the Papists, and that therefore they must withdraw or be expelled. This he could no longer put forward, and consequently he was driven either to adopt my lady's line, or side openly with the party of disorder. I saw his heavy face turn a deep red, and his jaw fall, as he grasped the situation. His wits worked slowly; and had he been left to himself, I do not doubt that he would have allowed things to remain as they were, and taken the part assigned to him.

But Master Dietz, who had listened with a lengthening face, at this moment interposed. "Will your excellency permit me to say a few words?" he said.

"I think the Burgomaster has made the matter clear," my lady answered coldly.

"Not in one respect," the Minister rejoined. "He has not informed your excellency that in the opinion of the majority of the burghers and inhabitants of this town the presence of these people is an offence and an eyesore."

"It is legal," my lady answered icily. "I do not know what opinion has to do with it."

"The opinion of the majority."

"Sir!" my lady said, speaking abruptly and with heightened colour, "in Heritzburg I am the majority, by your leave."

He frowned and set his face hard, but his eyes

sank before hers. "Nevertheless your excellency will allow," he said in a lower tone, "that the opinion of grave and orderly men deserves some consideration?"

"When it is on the side of law, every consideration," my lady answered, her eyes sparkling. "But when it is ranged against three defenceless people in violation of the law, none. And more, Master Dietz," she continued, her voice ringing with indignation, "it is to check such opinion, and defend against it those who would otherwise have no defence, that I conceive I sit here. And by my faith I will do it!"

She uttered the last words with so much fire and with her beautiful face so flushed with feeling, that I started forward where I stood; and for a farthing would have flung Dietz through the window. The little Minister was of a stern and hard nature, however. The nobility of my lady's position was lost upon him. He feared her less than he would have feared a man under the same circumstances; and though he stood cowed and silenced for the moment, he presently returned to the attack.

"Your excellency perhaps forgets," he said with a dry cough, "that the times are full of bloodshed and strife, though we at Heritzburg have hitherto enjoyed peace. I suggest with respect therefore, is it prudent to run the risk of bringing these evils into the town for

the sake of one or two Papists, whom it is only proposed to send elsewhere?"

My lady rose suddenly from her chair, and pointed with a finger, which trembled slightly, to the great window beside her. "Step up here!" she said curtly.

Master Dietz, wondering greatly, I could see, stepped on to the daïs. Thence the red roofs of the town, some new and smart, and some stained and grey with lichens and all the green valley stretching away to the dark line of wood, were visible, bathed in morning sunshine. The day was fine, the air clear, the smoke from the chimneys rose straight upward.

"Do you see?" she said.

The Minister bowed.

"Then take this for answer," she returned. "All that you see is mine to rule. It came to me by inheritance, and I prize the possession of it, though I am a woman, more highly than my life; for it came to me from Heaven and my fathers. But were it a hundred times as large, Master Dietz, were there a house for every brick that now stands there, and an acre for every furrow, and sheep as many as birds in the air, even then I would risk all, and double and treble all if I had it, rather than desert those whom my law defends, be they three, or thirty, or three hundred! Let that be your answer! And for the peace you speak of," she continued, turning on a sudden and confronting us, her

face aglow with anger, "the peace, I mean, you have hitherto enjoyed, it should shame you to hear it mentioned! Have the Papists harried you? Have you suffered in life or limb, or property? No. And why? Because of my honoured uncle, a Papist! For shame!—for shame, I say! As it has been dealt out to you, go and do to others!"

I vow but for the respect which held me in her presence, I could have cried "Huzza!" to her speech. I can tell you, it made Master Minister look as small as a mouse. He stepped down from the daïs with his face dark and his head trembling, and after that I never doubted that he was at the bottom of the movement against the Worts, though the ruffianly deserters I have mentioned supplied him with the tools, without which he might not have taken up the work. He stood a moment on the floor looking very black and grim, and with not a word to say, but I doubted he was not beaten. What line he would have taken in the end, however, I cannot tell, for he had scarcely descended—my lady had not resumed her seat—when there came up from the court below a sudden babel of noise, the trampling of hoofs and feet on the pavement, and a confused murmur of voices. For a moment I looked at my lady and she at me. It struck me that what the Burgomaster had hinted at was come to pass: that some of the town ragamuffins had dared to invade the castle.

The same idea must have occurred to her, for she stepped, though without any appearance of alarm, to the window, which commanded a side view of the terrace. She looked out.

I, a little on her right, saw her smile; then in a moment she turned. "This could not be better," she exclaimed, resuming in an instant her ordinary manner. I think she was a little ashamed, as people of quality are wont to be, of the feeling she had betrayed. "I see some one below who will advise me, and if I am doing wrong, as you seem to fear, Master Burgomaster, will tell me of it. My cousin, the Waldgrave Rupert, whom I expected to-morrow, has just arrived. Be good enough to wait while I receive him, and I will then return to you."

Bidding me have the two served with some refreshment, she stepped down from the daïs, and withdrew with Fräulein Max and her women, leaving the townsmen to discuss the new arrival with what appetite they might.

They liked it little, I fancy. In a moment their importance was gone, their consequence at an end. The name of the Waldgrave Rupert made them feel how small they were, despite all their boasting, beside the youngest member of the family. The very swish of my lady's robe as she swept through the doorway flouted them, her departure was an offence; and this, following

on the scolding they had received, produced a soreness and irritation in their minds, which ill-prepared them, I think, for the sequel.

I have sometimes thought that had I remained with them, and paid them some small attentions, the end might have been different; but my duties called me elsewhere. The house was in a ferment. I was wanted here and there, both to give orders and to see them carried out. It was some time before I was at liberty even to go to the hall whither my lady had descended to receive her guest, and where I found the two standing together on the hearth, under the great Red Hart which is the cognizance of the family.

I had not seen the Waldgrave Rupert—a cadet of the noble house of Weimar and my lady's cousin once removed—since he was a boy. I found him grown into a splendid man, as tall and almost as wide as myself, who used to be called in the old forest days before I entered my lady's service “the strong man of Pippel.” As he stood on the hearth, fair-haired and ruddy-faced, with a noble carriage and a frank boyish smile, I knew I had seldom looked on a handsomer youth. He fell short of my lady's age by two years; but as I looked from one to the other, they seemed so fitting a pair, the disparity went for nothing. He was young and strong, full of spirit and energy and fire. Surely, I thought, the right man had come at last!

In this belief I was more than confirmed when he came forward and greeted me pleasantly, vowing he remembered me well. His voice and laugh seemed to fill the room. The very ring of his spurs on the stones gave assurance of power. I saw my lady look at him with an air of affectionate pride—she had seen him more lately than I had—as if his youth, and strength, and beauty already in a sense belonged to her. His very smile was infectious. We all grew in a moment brighter, younger, and more cheerful. The house which yesterday had seemed quiet and lonesome—we were a small family for so great a dwelling—took on a new air. The servants went about their tasks more quickly, the maids laughed behind doors. The place seemed in an hour transformed, as I have seen a valley in the mountains changed on a sudden by the rising of the sun.

I pledge you my word, when I had been in his presence five minutes, the Burgomaster and the Minister upstairs seemed as common and mean and insignificant a pair of fellows as any in Germany. I wondered I could ever have feared them. The Countess had told him the story, and he asked me one or two questions about them, his tone high, and his head in the air. I answered him, and was for accompanying him upstairs, when he went to see them, with my lady by his side, and his whip slapping his great thigh boots until the

staircase rang again. But my lady had an errand and sent me on it, and so I was not present at the end of this interview which I had myself brought about.

But I suppose that the scolding my lady had given them was no more than a flea-bite beside the rating the young Waldgrave inflicted. It was notorious for a score of leagues round, and he told them so in good round terms, that the Heritzburg land had been spared by friend and foe for Count Tilly's sake, for his sake and his alone—a Papist. How, then, he asked them, had they the face to do this dirty trick, and threaten my lady besides? with much more of the same kind, and hard words, not to say menaces; sparing neither Mayor nor Minister, so that they went off at last like whipped dogs or thieves that have seen the gallows.

Afterwards something was said; but at the time no one missed them. Except by myself, scarcely a thought was given to them after they went out of the door. The house was all agog about the new-comer; the still-room full of work and the chimneys smoking. The young lord was everywhere, and the maids were mad about him. I had my hands full, and every one in the house seemed to be in much the same case. No one had time to look abroad.

Except Fräulein Anna Max, my lady's companion. I found her about four o'clock in the afternoon sitting alone in the hall. She had a book before her as usual,

but on my entrance she pushed it away from her, and looked up at me, screwing up her eyes in the odd way peculiar to her.

"Well, Master Martin," she said—and her voice sounded ill-natured, "so the fire has been lit—but not by you."

"The fire?" I answered, utterly at a loss for the moment.

"Ay," she rejoined, with a bitter smile, "the fire. Don't you hear it burning?"

"I hear nothing," I said coldly.

"Go to the terrace, and perhaps you will!" she retorted.

Her words filled me with a vague uneasiness, but I was too proud to go then or seem to heed them. An hour or two later, however, when the sun was half down, and the shadows of the chimneys lay far over the roofs, and the eastern woods were all aglow, I went to the wall which bounds the terrace and looked down. The hum of the town came up to my ears as it has come up to that wall any time these hundred years. But was I mistaken, or did there mingle with it this evening a harsher note than usual, a rancorous murmur, as of angry voices; and something sterner, lower, and more menacing, the clamour of a great crowd?

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CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRE ALIGHT.

I LAUGHED at my own fears when the morning came, and showed no change except that cheerful one, which our guest's presence had worked inside the castle. Below, to-day was as yesterday. The sun shone as brightly on the roofs, the smoke of the chimneys rose as peacefully in the air; the swallows circling round the eaves swung this way and that as swiftly and noiselessly as of old. The common sounds of everyday life, the clank of the pump in the market-place as the old crones drew water, and the cry of the wood-cutter hawking his stuff, alone broke the stillness. I sniffed the air, and smiling at Fräulein Anna's warning, went back into the house, where any fears which yet lingered in my mind took instant flight at sound of the Waldgrave's voice, so cheerful was it, so full of life and strength and confidence.

I do not know what it was in him, but something there was which carried us all the way he wished us to go. Did he laugh at the thought of danger; straightway we laughed too, and this though I knew Heritzburg and he did not. Did he speak scornfully of the burghers; forthwith they seemed to us a petty lot. When he strode up and down the terrace, showing us

how a single gun placed here or there, or in the corner, would in an hour reduce the town; on the instant we deemed him a Tilly. When he dubbed Hofman and Dietz, "Old Fat and Lean," the groom-boys, who could not be kept from his heels, sniggered, and had to be whipped back to the stables. In a word, he won us all. His youth, his gaiety, his confidence, were irresistible.

He dared even to scold my lady, saying that she had cosseted the townsfolk and brought this trouble on herself by pleasuring them; and she, who seemed to us the proudest of the proud, took it meekly, laughing in his face. It required no conjuror to perceive that he admired her, and would fain shine in her presence. That was to be expected. But about my mistress I was less certain, until after breakfast nothing would suit her but an immediate excursion to the White Maiden—the great grey spire which stands on the summit of the Oberwald. Then I knew that she had it in her mind to make the best figure she could; for though she talked of showing him game in that direction, and there was a grand parade of taking dogs, all the world knows that the other side of the valley is the better hunting-ground. I was left to guess that the White Maiden was chosen because all the Heritzburg land can be seen from its foot, and not corn and woodland, pasture and meadow only, but the gem of all—the town nestling

babe-like in the lap of the valley, with the grey towers rising like the face of some harsh nurse above it.

My Lord jumped at the plan. Doubtless he liked the prospect of a ride through the forest by her side. When she raised some little demur, stepping in the way of her own proposal, as I have noticed women will, and said something about the safety of the castle, if so many left it, he cried out eagerly that she need not fear.

"I will leave my people," he said. "Then you will feel quite sure that the place is safe. I will answer for them that they will hold your castle against Wallenstein himself."

"But how many have you with you?" my lady asked curiously; a little mischievously too, perhaps, for I think she knew.

His handsome face reddened and he looked rather foolish for a moment.

"Well, only four, as a fact," he said. "But they are perfect paladins, and as good as forty. In your defence, cousin, I would pit them against a score of the hardest Swedes that ever followed the King."

My lady laughed.

"Well, for this day, I will trust them," she said gaily. "Martin, order the grooms to saddle Pushka for me. And you, cousin, shall have the honour of mounting me. It is an age since I have had a frolic."

Sometimes I doubt if my lady ever had such a frolic

again. Happier days she saw, I think, and many and many of them, I hope; but such a day of careless sunny gaiety, spent in the May greenwood, with joy and youth riding by her, with old servants at her heels, and all the beauties of her inheritance spread before her in light and shadow, she never again enjoyed. We went by forest paths, which, winding round the valley, passed through woodlands, where the horses sank fetlock-deep in moss, and the laughing voices of the riders died away among the distant trunks. Here were fairy rings deep-plunged in braken, and chalky bottoms whence springs rose bright as crystal, and dim aisles of beeches narrowing into darkness, where last year's leaves rustled ghostlike under foot, and the shadow of a squirrel startled the boldest. Once, emerging on the open down where the sun lay hot and bright, my lady gave her horse the rein, and for a mile or more we sped across the turf, with hoofs thundering on either hand, and bits jingling, and horses pulling, only to fall into a walk again with flushed cheeks and brighter eyes, on the edge of the farther wood. Thence another mile, across the steep hillside through dwarf oaks and huge black-thorn trees, brought us to the foot of the Maiden, and we drew rein and dismounted, and stood looking down on the vale of Heritzburg, while the grooms unpacked the dinner.

There is a niche in the great pillar, a man's height

from the ground, in which one person may conveniently sit. The young Waldgrave spied it.

"Up to the throne, cousin!" he cried, and helped her to it, sitting himself on the ledge at her feet, with his legs dangling. "Why, there is the Werra!" he exclaimed.

A large quantity of rain had fallen that spring, and the river which commonly runs low between its banks, was plainly visible, crossing like a silver streak the distant mouth of the valley.

"Yes," my lady answered. "That is the Werra, and beyond it is, I suppose, the world."

"Whither I must go back this day week," he said, between sighing and smiling. "Then, hey for the south and Nuremberg, the good cause and the great King."

"You have seen him?"

"Once only."

"And is he so great a fighter?" my lady asked.

"How can he fail to be when he and his men fight and pray alternately," the Waldgrave answered; "when there is no license in the camp, and a Swede thinks death the same as victory?"

"Where is he now?"

"At Munich, in Bavaria."

"How it would have grieved my uncle," my lady said, with a sigh.

"He died as he would have wished to die," the

Waldgrave answered gently. "He believed in his cause, as the King of Sweden believes in his; and he died for it. What more can a man ask? But here is Franz with all sorts of good things. And I am afraid a feast of beauty, however perfect, does not prevent a man getting hungry."

"That is a very pretty compliment to Heritzburg," my lady said, laughing.

"Or its chatelaine!" I heard him murmur, with a tender look. But my lady only laughed again and called to me to come and name the hills, and tell my lord what land went with each of the three hamlets between which the lower valley is divided.

Doubtless that was but one of a hundred gallant things he said to her, and whereat she laughed, during the pleasant hour they whiled away at the foot of the pillar, basking in the warm sunshine, and telling the valley farm by farm. For the day was perfect, the season spring. I lay on my side and dreamed my own dream under the trees, with the hum of insects in my ears. No one was in a hurry to rise, or set a term to such a time.

Still we had plenty of daylight before us when my lady mounted and turned her face homewards, thinking to reach the castle a little after five. But a hare got up as we crossed the open down, and showing good sport, as these long-legged mountain hares will, led us

far out of our way, and caused us to spend nearly an hour in the chase. Then my lady spied a rare flower on the cliffside; and the young Waldgrave must needs get it for her. And so it wanted little of sunset when we came at last in sight of the bridge which spans the ravine at the back of the castle. I saw in the distance a lad seated on the parapet, apparently looking out for us, but I thought nothing of it. The descent was steep and we rode down slowly, my lady and the Waldgrave laughing and talking, and the rest of us sitting at our ease. Nor did the least thought of ill occur to my mind until I saw that the lad had jumped down from the wall and was running towards us waving his cap.

My lady, too, saw him.

"What is it, Martin?" she said, turning her head to speak to me.

I told her I would see, and trotted forward along the side of the path until I came within call. Then I cried to the lad to know what it was. I saw something in his face which frightened me; and being frightened and blaming myself, I was ready to fall on the first I met.

"The town!" he answered, panting up to my stirrup. "There is fighting going on, Master Martin. They are pulling down Klink's house."

"So, so," I answered, for at the first sight of his face I feared worse. "Have you closed the gate at the head of the steps?"

"Yes," he said, "and my lord's men are guarding it."

"Right!" I answered. And then my lady came up, and I had to break the news to her. Of course the young Waldgrave heard also, and I saw his eyes sparkle with pleasure.

"Ha! the rascals!" he exclaimed. "Now we will trounce them! Trust me, cousin, we will teach these boors such a lesson as they shall long remember. But what is it?" he continued, turning to my lady who had not spoken. "The Queen of Heritzburg is not afraid of her rebellious subjects?"

My lady's eyes flashed.

"No, I am not afraid," she said, with contempt. "But Klink's house? Do you mean the Red Hart, Martin?"

I said I did.

She plucked her horse by the head, and stopped short under the arch of the gateway. I think I see her now bending from her saddle with the light on the woods behind her, and her face in shadow. Then "Forgotten in a day," she said, her voice quivering with excitement and sudden feeling. "Martin," she continued, "take what men you have and go down into the town. Bring them off at all risks! See to it yourself. If harm come to them, I shall not forgive you easily."

The Waldgrave sprang from his horse on the instant, and cried out that he would go. But my lady called to him to stay with her.

"Martin knows the streets, and you do not," she said, sliding unassisted to the ground. "But he shall take your men, if you do not object."

We dismounted, in a confused medley of men and horses, in the stable court, which is small and, being surrounded by high buildings, was almost dark. The grooms left at home had gone to the front of the house to see the sight, and there was no one to receive us. I bade the five men who had ridden with us get their arms, and leaving the horses loose to be caught and cared for by the lad who had met us, I hastened after my lady and the Waldgrave, who had already disappeared under the arch which leads to the Terrace Court.

To pass through this was to pass from night to day, so startling was the change. From one end to the other the terrace was aglow with red light. The last level beams of the sun shone straight in our eyes as we emerged, and so blinded us, that I advanced, seeing nothing before me but a row of dark figures leaning over the parapet. If we could not see, however, we could hear. A hoarse murmur, unlike anything I had heard before, came up from the town, and rising and falling in waves of sound, now a mere whisper, and

now a dull savage roar, caused the boldest to tremble. I heard my lady cry, "Those poor people! Those poor people!" and saw her clench her hands in impotent anger; and that sight, or the sound—which seemed the more weirdly menacing as the town lay in twilight below us, and we could make out no more than a few knots of women standing in the market-place—or it may be some memory of the helpless girl I had seen at Klink's, so worked upon me that I had got the gate unbarred and was standing at the head of the steps outside before I knew that I had stirred or given an order.

Some one thrust a half pike into my hand, and mechanically I counted out the men—four of the Waldgrave's and five, six, seven of our own. A strange voice—but it may have been my own—cried, "Not by the High Street. Through the lane by the wall!" and the next moment we were down out of the sunlight and taking the rough steps three at a time. The High Street reached, we swung round in a body to the right, and plunging into Shoe Wynd, came to the locksmith's, and thence went on by the way I had gone that other evening.

The noise was less down in the streets. The houses intervened and deadened it. At some of the doors women were standing, listening and looking out with grey faces, but one and all fled in at our approach,

which seemed to be the signal, wherever we came, for barring doors and shooting bolts; once a man took to his heels before us, and again near the locksmith's we encountered a woman bare-headed and carrying something in her arms. She almost ran into the midst of us, and at the last moment only avoided us by darting up the side-alley by the forge. Whether these people knew us for what we were, and so fled from us, or took us for a party of the rioters, it was impossible to say. The narrow lanes were growing dark, night was falling on the town; only the over-hanging eaves showed clear and black against a pale sky. The way we had to go was short, but it seemed long to me; for a dozen times between the castle steps and Klink's house I thought of the poor girl at her prayers, and pictured what might be happening.

Yet we cannot have been more than five minutes going from the steps to the corner beyond the forge, whence we could see Klink's side window. A red glare shone through it, and cleaving the dark mist which filled the alley fell ruddily on the town wall. It seemed to say that we were too late, and my heart sank at the sight. Nor at the sight only, for as we turned the corner, the hoarse murmur we had heard on the Terrace, and which even there had sounded ominous, swelled to an angry roar, made up of cries and cursing, with bursts of reckless cheering, and now and

again a yell of pain. The street away before us, where the lane ran into it, was full of smoky light and upturned faces; but I took no heed of it, my business was with the window. I cried to the men behind me and hurried on till I stood before it, and clutching the bars—the glass was broken long ago—looked in.

The room was full of men. For a moment I could see nothing but heads and grim faces and wild excited eyes, all crowded together, and all alike distorted by the lurid light shed by a couple of torches held close to the ceiling. Some of the men standing in such groups as the constant jostling permitted, were talking, or rather shouting to one another. Others were savagely forcing back their fellows who wished to enter; while a full third were gathered with their faces all one way round the corner where I had seen the sick man. Here the light was strongest, and in this direction I gazed most anxiously. But the crowded figures intercepted all view; neither there nor anywhere else could I detect any sign of the girl or child. The men in that corner seemed to be gazing at something low down on the floor, something I could not see. A few were silent, more were shouting and gesticulating.

I stretched my hands through the bars, and grasping a man by the shoulders, dragged him to me. "What is it?" I cried in his ear, heedless whether he knew me, or took me for one of the ruffians who were every-

where battling to get into the house. At the window we had anticipated some by a second only. "What is it?" I repeated fiercely, resisting all his efforts to get free.

"Nothing!" he answered, glaring at me. "The man is dead; cannot you see?"

"I can see nothing!" I retorted. "Dead is he?"

"Ay, dead, and a good job too!" the rascal answered, making a fresh attempt to get away, "Dead when we came in."

"And the girl?" I asked.

"Gone, the Papist witch, on a broomstick!" he answered. "Through the wall or the ceiling or the key-hole, or through this window; but only on a broomstick. The bars would skin a cat!"

I let him go and looked at the bars. They were an inch thick, and a very few inches apart. It seemed impossible that a child, much more a grown woman, could pass between them. As the fellow said, there was barely room for a cat to pass.

Yet my mind clung to the bars. Klink might have hidden the girl, for without doubt he had neither foreseen nor meant anything like this. But something told me that she had gone by the window, and I turned from it with renewed hope.

It was time I did turn. The crowd had got wind of our presence and resented it. All who could not get

into the house to slake their curiosity or anger, had pressed into the narrow alley where we stood, while the air rang with cries of "No Popery! Down with the Papists!" When I turned I found my fellows hard put to it to keep their position. To retreat, close pressed as we were, seemed as difficult as to stand; but by making a resolute movement all together, we charged in front for a moment, and taking advantage of the interval, fell back as quickly as we could, facing round whenever it seemed that our followers were coming on too boldly for safety.

In this way, the knaves with me being stout and some of them used to the work, we retreated in good order and without hurt as far as the end of Shoe Wynd. Then I discovered to my dismay that a portion of the mob had made along the High Street and were waiting for us on the steep ascent where the wynd runs into the street.

Hitherto no harm had been done on either side, but we now found ourselves beset front and back. To add to the confusion of the scene night had set in. The narrow wynd was as dark as pitch, save where the light of a chance torch showed huddled forms and snarling faces, while the din and tumult were enough to daunt the boldest.

That moment, I confess, was one of the worst I have known. I felt my men waver; a little more and they

might break and the mob deal with us as it would. On the other hand, I knew that to plunge, exposed to attack as we were from behind, into the mass of men who blocked the way to the steps, would be madness. We should be surrounded and trodden down. There were not perhaps fifty really dangerous fellows in the town; but a mob I have noticed is a strange thing. Men who join it, intending merely to look on, are carried away by excitement, and soon find themselves cursing and fighting, burning and raiding with the foremost.

A brief pause and I gave the word to face about again. As I expected, the gang in the alley gave way before us. The pursued became the pursuers. My men's blood was up now, their patience exhausted; and for a few moments pike and staff played a merry tune. But quickly the mob behind closed up on our heels. Stones began to be thrown, and presently one, dropped I think from a window, struck a man beside me and felled him to the ground.

That was our first loss. Drunken Steve, a great gross fellow, always in trouble, but a giant in strength, picked him up—we could not leave the man to be murdered—and plunged on with us bearing him under his arm.

“Good man!” I cried between my teeth. And I swore it should save the drunkard from many a scrape.

But the next moment another was down, and him I had to pick up myself. Then I saw that we were as good as doomed. Against the stones we had no shield.

The men saw it too, and cried out, beside themselves with rage. We were as rats, set in a pit to be worried—in the dark with a hundred foes tearing at us. And the town seemed to have gone mad—mad! Above the screams and wicked laughter, and all the din about us, I heard the great church bell begin to ring, and hurling its notes, now sharp, now dull, down upon the seething streets, swell and swell the tumult until the very sky seemed one in the league against us!

Blind with fury—for what had we done?—we turned on the mob which followed us and hurled it back—back almost to the High Street. But that way was no exit for us, the crowd stood so close they could not even fly. Round we whirled again, wild and desperate now, and charged down the alley towards the West Gate, thinking possibly to win through and out by that way. We had almost reached the locksmith's when another man fell. He was of the Waldgrave's following, and his comrade stooped to raise him; but only to fall over him, wounded in his turn.

What happened after that I only knew in part. From that moment all was a medley of random blows and strugglings in the dark. The crowd seeing half of us down, and the rest entangled, took heart of grace, I

believe, to finish us. I remember a man dashing a torch in my face, and the blow blinding me. Nevertheless I staggered forward to close with him. Then something tripped me up, something or some one struck me from behind as I fell. I went down like an ox, and for me the fight was over.

Drunken Steve and two of the Waldgrave's men fought over me, I am told, for a minute or more. Then Steve fell and an odd thing happened. The mob took fright at nothing—took fright at their own work, and coming suddenly to their senses, poured pell-mell out of the alley faster than they had come into it. The two strangers, knowing nothing of the way or the town, knocked at the nearest door and were taken in, and sheltered till morning.

CHAPTER V.

MARIE WORT.

THERE never was one of my forefathers could read, or knew so much as a horn-book when he saw it; and therefore I, though a clerk, have a brain pan that will stand as much as any scholar's and more than many a simple man's. Otherwise the blow I got that night must have done me some great mischief, instead of merely throwing me into a swoon, in which I lay until the morning was well advanced.

When I came to myself with an aching head and a dry mouth, I was hard put to it for a time to think what had happened to me. The place in which I lay was dark, with spots of red lights like flaming eyes here and there. An odour of fire and leather and iron filled my nostrils. A hoarse soughing as of a winded horse came and went regularly, with a dull rumbling and creaking that seemed to shake the place. Dizzy as I was, I rose on my elbow with an effort, and looked round. But my eyes swam, I could see nothing which enlightened me, and with a groan I fell back. Then I found that I was lying on a straw-bed, with bandages round my head, and gradually the events of the night came back to me. My mind grew clearer. Yet it still failed to tell me where I was, or whence came the hoarse choking sound, like the sighing of some giant of the Harz, which I heard.

On a sudden, while I lay wondering and fearing, a door opened and let into the dark place a flood of ruddy light. Framed in this light a young girl appeared standing on the threshold. She held a tray in her hand, and paused to close the door behind her. The bright glow which shone around her, gave her a strange unearthly air, picking out gold in her black locks and warming her pale cheeks; but for all that I recognised her. And never was I more astonished. She was no other than the daughter of the Papist Wort—the

girl to rescue whom we had gone down to the Red Hart.

I could not restrain an exclamation of surprise, and the girl started and stopped, peering into the corner in which I lay.

"Master Martin," she said in a low tone, "was that you?"

I had never heard her speak before, and I found, perhaps by reason of my weakness, and a softness which pain induces in the roughest, peculiar sweetness in her voice. I would not answer for a moment. I made her speak again.

"Master Martin," she said, advancing timidly, "are you yourself again?"

"I don't know," I muttered. In very fact I was so much puzzled that this was nearly the truth. "If you will tell me where I am, I may be able to say," I added, turning my head with an effort.

"You are in the kitchen behind the locksmith's forge," she answered plainly. "He is a good man, and you are in no danger. The window is shuttered to keep the light from your eyes."

"And the noise I hear is the bellows at work?"

"Yes," she answered, coming near. "It is almost noon. If you will drink this broth you will get your strength again."

I seized the bowl and drank greedily. When I set it down, my eyes seemed clearer and my mind stronger.

"Tell me how you escaped," I said.

The more I grew able to think, the more remarkable it seemed to me that the girl should be here—here in the same house in which I lay.

"Through the window," she answered, in a faint voice.

As she spoke she turned from me. I knew that she was thinking of her father and would fain hide her face.

"But the bars?" I said.

"I am very small," she answered in the same low tone.

I do not know why, but perhaps because of the weakness and softness I have mentioned, I found something very pitiful in the answer. It stirred a sudden rush of anger in my heart. I pictured this helpless girl chased through the streets by the howling pack of cravens we had encountered, and for a few seconds, bruised and battered as I was, I felt the fighting spirit again. I half rose, then turned giddy, and sank back again. It was a minute or more before I could ask another question. At last I murmured—

"You have not told me how you came here?"

"I was coming up the alley," she answered shuddering, "when at the corner by this house I met men coming to meet me. I fled up the passage to escape

them, and finding no outlet, and seeing a light here, I knocked. I thought that some woman might pity me and take me in."

"And Peter did?"

"Yes," she answered simply. "May Our Lady reward him."

"We were the men you met," I said drowsily. "I remember now. You were carrying your brother."

"My brother?"

"Yes, the child."

"Oh, yes," she answered, in rather a strange fashion; but I was too dull to do more than notice it. "The child of course."

I could ask no more. My head was already splitting with pain. I lay back, and I suppose went off into a swoon again, sleeping all that day and until the morning of the next was far advanced.

Then I awoke to find the place in which I lay changed from a cave of mystery to a low-roofed dingy room; the shutter of the window stood half-open, admitting a ray of sunshine and a breath of pure air. A small fire burned on the hearth, a black pot bubbled beside it. For the room itself, a litter of old iron stood in every corner; bunches of keys and rows of rusty locks—pad-locks, fetter-locks, and door-locks—hung on all the walls. One or two chests, worm-eaten and rickety, but prized by their present possessor for the antiquity

of their fastenings, stood here and there; with a great open press full of gun-locks, match-locks, wheel-locks, spring-locks and the like. Half a dozen arquebuses and pistols decorated the mantel-piece, giving the room something of the air of an armoury.

In the midst of all this litter sat old Peter himself, working away, with a pair of horn glasses on his forehead, at a small lock, which seemed to be giving him a vast amount of trouble. A dozen times at least I watched him fit a number of tiny parts together, only to scatter them all again in his leather apron, and begin to pare one or other of them with a little file. At length he laid the work down, as if he were tired, and looking up found my eyes fixed upon him.

He nodded cheerfully. "Good," he said. "Now you look yourself, Martin. No more need of febrifuges. Another night's sleep, and you may go abroad."

"Peter," I said, striving to collect my thoughts, "what day is it?"

"Friday," he answered, looking at me with his shrewd, pleasant eyes. He was an old man, over sixty, a widower with two young children, and clever at his trade. I never knew a better man. "Wednesday night you came here," he continued, showing in his countenance the pleasure it gave him to see me recovering.

"I must go to the castle," I exclaimed, rising abruptly and sitting up. "Do you hear? I must go."

"I do not see the necessity," he answered, looking at me coolly and without budging an inch.

"My lady will need me," I said.

"Not at all," he answered, in the same suave quiet tone. "You may make your mind easy about that. The Countess is safe and well. She is in the castle, and the gates are shut.

"But she has not——" Then I stopped. I was going to say too much.

"She has not half a dozen men with her, you would say," he replied placidly. "Well, no. But one is a man, it seems. The young lord has turned a couple of cannon on the town, and all our valiant scoundrels are shaking in their shoes."

"A couple of cannon!" I exclaimed. "But there are no cannon in the castle!"

"You are mistaken," Peter answered drily. He had a very dry way with him at times. "I have seen the muzzles of them, myself, and you can see them, if you please, from the attic window. One is trained on the market-place, and one to fire down the High Street. To-morrow morning our Burgomaster and the Minister are to go up and make their peace. And I can tell you some of our brisk boys feel the rope already round their necks.

"Is this true?" I said, hardly able to believe the tale.

"As true as you please," he answered. "If you will

take my advice you will lie quietly here until to-morrow morning, and then go up to the castle. No one will molest you. The townsfolk will be only too glad to find you alive, and that they have so much the less to pay for. I should not wonder if you saved half a dozen necks," Peter added, almost regretfully. "For I hear the Countess is finely mad about you."

At this mention of my lady's regard my eyes filled so that I had much ado to hide my emotion. Affecting to find the light too strong I turned my back on Peter, and then for the first time became aware that I had a companion in misfortune. On a heap of straw behind me lay another man, so bandaged about the head that I could see nothing of his features.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, straightening myself that I might have a better view of him. "Who is this?"

"Your man Steve," Peter said briefly. "But for him and another, Master Martin, I do not think that you would be here."

"You do well to remind me," I answered, feeling shame that I had not yet thanked him, or asked him how I came to be in safety. "Tell me how it was."

"Well," he said, "it began with the girl. The doings on Wednesday night were not much to my mind, as you may suppose, and I shut up early and kept myself close. About seven, when the racket had not yet risen to its height, there came a knocking at my door. For

a while I took no notice of it, but presently as it continued, I went to listen, and heard such a sobbing on the step as the heart of man could not resist. So I opened and found the Papist girl there with a child. I do not know," Peter continued, pushing forward his greasy old cap and rubbing his head, "that I should have opened it if I had been sure who it was. But as the door was open, the girl had to come in."

"I do not think you will repent it!" I said.

"I don't know that I shall," he answered thoughtfully. "However, she had not been long inside and the bolts shot on us, when there began a most tremendous scrimmage in the lane, which lasted off and on for half an hour. Then followed a sudden silence. I had given the girl some food, and told her she might sleep with the children upstairs, and we were sitting before the fire while she cried a bit—she was all over of a shake, you understand—when on a sudden she stood up, and listened.

"What is it?" I said.

She did not answer for a while, but still stood listening, looking now at me and now towards the forge in a queer eager kind of way. I told her to sit down, but she did not seem to hear, and presently she cried, "There is some one there!"

"Well," said I, "they will stop there then. I don't open that door again to-night."

“She looked at me pitifully, but sat down for all the world as if I had struck her. Not for long, however. In a minute she was up again, and began to go to and fro between the kitchen and the forge door like nothing else but a cat looking for her kittens. ‘Sit down, wench,’ I said. But this time she took no heed, and at last the sight of her going up and down like a dumb creature in pain was too much for me, and I got up and undid the door. She was out in a minute, seeming not a bit afraid for herself, and sure enough, there were you and Steve lying one on the top of the other on the step, and so still that I thought you gone. Heaven only knows how she heard you.”

“Peter,” I said abruptly, “have you any water handy?”

“To be sure,” he replied, starting up. “Are you thirsty?”

I nodded, and he went to get it, blaming himself for his thoughtlessness. He need not have reproached himself, however. I was not thirsty; but I could not bear that he should sit and look at me at that moment. The story he had told had touched me—and I was still weak; and I could not answer for it, I should not burst into tears like a woman. The thought of this girl’s persistence, who in everything else was so weak, of her boldness who in her own defence was a hare, of her strange instinct on our behalf who seemed made

only to be herself protected—the thought of these things touched me to the heart and filled me with an odd mixture of pity and gratitude! I had gone to save her, and she had saved me! I had gone to shield her from harm, and heaven had led me to her door, not in strength but in weakness. She had fled from me who came to help her; that when I needed help, she might be at hand to give it!

“Where is she?” I muttered, when he came back and I had drunk.

“Who? Marie?” he asked.

“Yes, if that is her name,” I said, drinking again.

“She is lying down upstairs,” he answered. “She is worn out, poor child. Not that in one sense, Master Martin,” he continued, dropping his voice and nodding with a mysterious air, “she *is* poor. Though you might think it.”

“How do you mean?” I said, raising my head and meeting his eyes. He nodded.

“It is between ourselves,” he answered; “but I am afraid there is a good deal in what our rascals here say. I am afraid, to be plain, Master Martin, the father was like all his kind: plundered many an honest citizen, and roasted many a poor farmer before his own fire. It is the way of soldiers in that army; and God help the country they march in, be it friend’s or foe’s!”

“Well?” I said impatiently; “but what of that now?”

The mention of these things fretted me. I wanted to hear nothing about the father. "The man is dead," I said.

"Ay, he is," Peter answered slowly and impressively. "But the daughter? She has got a necklace round her neck now, worth—worth I dare say two hundred men at arms."

"What, ducats?"

"Ay, ducats! Gold ducats. It is worth all that."

"How do you know?" I said, staring at him. "I have never seen such a thing on her. And I have seen the girl two or three times."

"Well, I will tell you," he answered, glancing first at the window and then at Steve to be sure that we were not overheard. "I'll tell you. When we had carried you into the house the other night she took off her kerchief, to tear a piece from it to bind up your head. That let me see the necklace. She was quick to cover it up when she remembered herself. But not quick enough."

"Is it of gold?" I asked.

He nodded. "Fifteen or sixteen links I should say, and each as big as a small walnut. Carved and shaped like a walnut too."

"It may be silver-gilt," I said.

He laughed. "I am a smith, though only a locksmith," he answered. "Trust me for knowing gold. I doubt it came from Magdeburg; I doubt it did. Magdeburg, or Halle, which my Lord Tilly ravaged about that

time. And if so there is blood upon it. It will bring the girl no luck, depend upon it."

"If we talk about it, I'll be sworn it will not!" I answered savagely. "There are plenty here who would twist her neck for so much as a link of it."

"You are right, Master Martin," he answered meekly. "Perhaps I should not have mentioned it; but I know you are safe. And after all the girl has done nothing."

That was true, but it did not content me. I wished he had not seen what he had, or that he had not told me the tale. A minute before I had been able to think of the girl with pure satisfaction; to picture with a pleasant warmth about my heart her gentleness, her courage, her dark mild beauty that belonged as much to childhood as womanhood, the thought for others that made her flight a perpetual saving. But this spoiled all. The mere possession of this necklace, much more the use of it, seemed to sully her in my eyes, to taint her freshness, to steal the perfume from her youth.

For I am peasant born, of those on whom the free-companions have battered from the beginning; and spoil won in such a way seemed to me to be accursed. Whether I would or no, horrid tales of the storming of Magdeburg came into my mind: tales of streets awash with blood, of churches blocked with slain, of women lying dead with living babes in their arms. And I shuddered. I felt the necklace a blot on all. I shrank

from one, who, with the face of a saint, wore under her kerchief gold dyed in such a fashion!

That was while I lay alone, tossing from side to side, and troubling myself unreasonably about the matter; since the girl was nothing to me, and a Papist. But when she came presently to me with a bowl of broth in her hands and a timid smile on her lips—a smile which gave the lie to the sadness of her eyes and the red rims that surrounded them—I forgot all, necklace and creed. I took the bowl silently, as she gave it. I gave it back with only one “Thank you,” which sounded hoarse and rustic in my own ears; but I suppose my eyes were more eloquent, for she blushed and trembled. And in the evening she did not come. Instead one of the children brought my supper, and sitting down on the straw beside me, twittered of Marie and “Go” and other things.

“Who is Go?” I said.

“Go is Marie’s brother,” the child answered, open-eyed at my ignorance. “You not know Go?”

“It is a strange name,” I said, striving to excuse myself.

“*He* is a strange man,” the little one retorted, pointing to Steve. “He does not speak. Now you speak. Marie says——”

“What does Marie say?” I asked, for the child had paused.

"Marie says you saved his life."

"Well, you can tell her it was the other way," I exclaimed roughly.

Twice that night when I awoke I heard a light foot-step, and turned to see the girl, moving to and fro among the rusty locks and ancient chests in attendance on Steve. He mended but slowly. She did not come near me at these times, and after a glance I pretended to fall asleep that I might listen unnoticed to her movements, and she be more free to do her will. But whenever I heard her and opened my eyes to see her slender figure moving in that dingy place, I felt the warmth about my heart again. I forgot the gold necklace; I thought no more of the rosary, only of the girl. For what is there which so well becomes a woman as tending the sick; an office which in a lover's eyes should set off his mistress beyond velvet and Flanders lace.

CHAPTER VI.

RUPERT THE GREAT.

I HAVE known a man very strong and very confident, whom the muzzle of a loaded pistol, set fairly against his head, has reduced to reason marvellously. So it fared with Heritzburg on this occasion. My lady's cannon, which I went up to the roof at day-break to see—and did see, to my great astonishment, trained one on the Market Square, and one down the High

Street—formed the pistol, under the cooling influence of which the town had so far come to its senses, that the game was now in my lady's hands. Peter assured me that the place was in a panic, that the Countess could hardly ask any amends that would not be made, and that as a preliminary the Burgomaster and Minister were to go to the castle before noon to sue for pardon. He suggested that I and the girl should accompany them.

"But does Hofman know that we are here?" I asked.

"Since yesterday morning; and no one more pleased to hear it!" the locksmith answered, with a grin. "If he had not you to present as a peace-offering, I doubt he would have fled the town before he would have gone up. As it is, they had fine work with him at the town-council yesterday."

"He is in a panic? Serve him right!" I said.

"I am told his cheeks shake like jelly," Peter answered. "Two of the Waldgrave's men are dead, you know, and some say the Countess will hang him out of hand. But you will go up with him?"

"Yes," I said. "I see no objection."

Some one else objected, however. When the plan was broached to the girl, she looked troubled. For a moment she did not speak, but stood before us silent and confused. Then she pointed to Steve.

"When is he going up, if you please?" she asked, in a troubled voice.

"He must go in a litter by the road," I answered. "Peter here will see to it this morning."

"Could I not go with him?" she said.

I looked at Peter and he at me. He nodded.

"I see no reason why you should not, if you prefer it," I said. "Either way you will be quite safe."

"I should prefer it, she muttered, in a low tone. And then she went out to get something for Steve, and we saw her no more.

"Drunken Steve is in luck," Peter said, looking after her with a smile. "She is wonderfully taken with him. She is a—she is a good girl, Papist or no Papist," he added thoughtfully.

I am not sure that he would have indorsed that later in the day. At the last moment, when I was about to leave the house to go up to the castle my way, and Steve and his party were on the point of starting by the West Gate and the road, something happened which gave both of us a kind of shock, though neither said a word to the other. Marie had brought down the little boy, a brave-eyed, fair-haired child about three years old, and was standing with us in the forge waiting with the child clinging to her skirt, when on a sudden she turned to Peter and began to thank him. A word and she broke down.

"Pooh, child!" Peter said kindly, patting her on

the shoulder. "It was little enough, and I am glad I did it. No thanks."

She answered between her sobs that it was beyond thanks, and called on Heaven to reward him.

"If I had anything," she continued, looking at him timidly, "if I had anything I could give you to prove my gratitude, I would so gladly give it. But I am alone, and I have nothing worth your acceptance. I have nothing in the world, unless," she added with an effort, "you would like my rosary."

"No," Peter said almost roughly. I noticed that he avoided my eye. "I do not want it. It is not a thing I use."

She said she had nothing; we knew she had that chain! Yet Heaven knows her face as she said it was fair enough to convert a Beza! She said she had nothing; we knew she had. Yet if ever genuine gratitude and thankfulness seemed to shine out of wet human eyes, they shone out of hers then.

What I could not stomach was the ingratitude. The fraud was too gross, too gratuitous; for she need have offered nothing. I turned away and went out of the forge without waiting for her to recover herself. I dreaded lest she should thank me in the same way.

I knew Peter, and knew he could have no motive for traducing her. He was old enough to be her grandfather, and a quiet good man. Therefore I was sure

that she had the chain, three or four links of which should be worth his shop of old iron.

But besides I had the evidence of my own eyes. There was a crinkle, a crease in her kerchief, for which the presence of the necklace would account; it was such a crease as a necklace of that size would cause. I had marked it when she brought the child into the room in her arms. The boy's right arm had been round her neck, and I had seen him relax his hold of her hair and steady himself by placing his little palm on that wrinkle, as on a sure and certain and familiar stay. So I knew that she had the necklace, and that she had lied about it.

But after all it was nothing to me. The girl was a Papist, a Bavarian, the daughter of a roistering free-booting rider, versed in camp life. If with a fair outside she proved to be at heart what every reasonable man would expect to find her, what then? I had no need to trouble my head. I had affairs enough of my own on my hands.

Yet the affair did trouble me. The false innocence of the child's face haunted and perplexed me, and would not leave me, though I tried to think of other things and had other things to think of. I was to meet the Burgomaster in the market-place, and go thence with him, and I had promised myself that I would make good use of my opportunities, that I would lose no

point of the town's behaviour, that not a lowering face should escape me, nor a quarter whence danger might arise in the future. But the girl's eyes made havoc of all my resolutions, and I had fairly reached the market-place before I remembered what I was doing.

There indeed a sight, which in a moment swept the cobwebs from my brain, awaited me. The square was full of people, not closely packed, but standing in loose groups, and all talking in voices so low as to produce a dull sullen sound more striking than silence. The Mayor and four or five Councillors occupied the steps of the market-house. Raised a head and shoulders above the throng, and glancing at it askance from time to time with scarcely disguised apprehension, they wore an air of irresolution it was impossible to mistake. Hofman in particular looked like a man with the rope already round his neck. His face was pale, his fat cheeks hung pendulous, his eyes never rested on anything for more than a second. They presently lit on me, and then if farther proof of the state of his mind was needed, I found it in the relief with which he hailed my appearance; relief, not the less genuine because he hastened to veil it from the jealous eyes that from every part of the square watched his proceedings.

The crowd made way for me silently. One in every two, perhaps, greeted me, and some who did not greet me, smiled at me fatuously. On the other hand,

I was struck by the air of gloomy expectation which prevailed. I discerned that a very little would turn it into desperation, and saw, or thought I saw, that cannon, or no cannon, this was a case for delicate and skilful handling. The town was panic-stricken, partly at the thought of what it had done, partly at the sight of the danger which threatened it. But panic is a double-edged weapon. It takes little to turn it into fury.

I made for the opening into the High Street, and the Burgomaster, coming down from the steps, passed through the crowd and met me there.

"This is a bad business, Master Martin," he said, meeting me with an odd mixture of shamefacedness and bravado. "We must do our best to patch it up."

"You had your warning," I answered coldly, turning with him up the street, every window and doorway in which had its occupant. Dietz and two or three Councillors followed us, the Minister's face looking flushed and angry, and as spiteful as a cat's. "Two lives have been lost," I continued, "and some one must pay for them."

Hofman mopped his face. "Surely," he said, "the three dead on our side, Master Martin——"

"I do not see what they have to do with it," I answered, maintaining a cold and uninterested air, which was torture to him. "It is your affair, however, not mine."

"But, my dear friend—Martin," he stammered, pluck-

ing my sleeve, "you are not revengeful. You will not make it worse? You won't do that?"

"Worse?" I retorted. "It is bad enough already. And I am afraid you will find it so."

He winced and looked at me askance, his eye rolling in a fever of apprehension. For a moment I really thought that he would turn and go back. But the crowd was behind; he was on the horns of a dilemma, and with a groan of misery he moved on, looking from time to time at the terrace above us. "Those cursed cannon," I heard him mutter, as he wiped his brow.

"Ay," I said, sharply, "if it had not been for the cannon you would have seen our throats cut before you would have moved. I quite understand that. But you see it is our turn now."

We were on the steps and he did not answer. I looked up, expecting to see the wall by the wicket-gate well-manned, but I was mistaken. No row of faces looked down from it. All was silent. A single man on guard at the wicket alone appeared. He bade us stand, and passed the word to another. He in his turn disappeared and presently old Jacob, with a half-pike on his shoulder, and a couple of men at his back, came stiffly out to receive us with all the formality and discipline of a garrison in time of war. He acknowledged my presence by a wink, but saluted my companions in the coldest manner, proceeding at once to march us

without a word spoken to the door of the house, where we were again bidden to stand.

All this filled me with satisfaction. I knew what effect it would have on Hofman, and how it would send his soul into his shoes. At the same time my satisfaction was not unmixed. I felt a degree of strangeness myself. The place seemed changed. The men, moving stiffly, had an unfamiliar air. I missed the respect I had enjoyed in the house. For the moment I was nobody; a prisoner, an alien person admitted grudgingly, and on sufferance.

I comforted myself with the reflection that all would be well when I reached the presence. But I was mistaken. I saw indeed my lady's colour come and go when I entered, and her eyes fell. But she kept her seat, she looked no more at me than at my companions, she uttered no greeting or word of acknowledgment. It was the Waldgrave who spoke—the Waldgrave who acted. In a second there came over me a bitter feeling that all was changed; that the old state of things at Heritzburg was past, and a rule to which I was a stranger set in its place.

Three or four of my lady's women were grouped behind her, while Franz and Ernst stood like statues at the farther door. Fräulein Anna, too, sat on a stool in the window-bay. And my lady's own presence was, as at all times, marked by a stateliness and dignity which

seemed to render it impossible that she should pass for second in any company. But for all that the Waldgrave, standing up straight and tall behind her, with his comeliness, his youth, and his manhood and the red light from the coat of arms in the stained window just touching his fair hair, did seem to me to efface her. It was he who stood there to pardon or punish, praise or blame, and not my lady. And I resented it.

Not that his first words to me were not words of kindness.

"Ha, Martin," he cried, his face lighting up, "I hear you fought like an ancient Trojan, and broke as many heads as Hector. And that your own proved too hard for them! Welcome back. In a moment I may want a word with you; but you must wait."

I stood aside, obeying his gesture, while he apologised, but with a very stern aspect, to Hofman and his companions for addressing me first.

"The Countess Rotha, however, Master Burgomaster," he continued, with grim suavity, "much as she desires to treat your office with respect, cannot but discern between the innocent and the guilty."

"The guilty? My lord!" Hofman cried, in such a hurry and trepidation, I could have laughed. "I trust there are none here."

"At any rate you represent them," the Waldgrave retorted.

"I, my lord?" the Mayor stammered, his hair almost standing on end.

"Ay, you; or why are you here?" the Waldgrave answered. "I understood you came to offer such amends as the town can make, and your lady accept."

Poor Hofman's jaw fell at this statement of his position, and he stood the picture of dismay and misery. The Waldgrave's peremptory manner, which shook him out of the rut of his slow wits, and upset his balanced periods, left him prostrate without a word to say. He gasped and remained silent. He was one of those people whose dull self-importance is always thrusting them into positions they are not intended to fill.

"Well?" the Waldgrave said, after a pause, "as you seem to have nothing to say, and judgment must ultimately come from your lady, I will proceed at once to declare it. And firstly, it is her will, Master Burgo-master, that within forty-eight hours you present to her on behalf of the town a humble petition and apology, acknowledging your fault, and that the same be entered on the town records."

"It shall be done," Master Hofman cried. His eagerness to assent was laughable.

"Secondly, that you pay a fine of a hundred gold ducats for the benefit of the children of the men wantonly killed in the riot."

"It shall be done," Master Hofman said, but this time not so readily.

"And lastly," the Waldgrave continued in a very clear voice, "that you deliver up for execution two in the market-place, one at the foot of the castle steps, and one at the West Gate, for a warning to all who may be disposed to offend again—four of the principal offenders in the late riot."

"My lord!" the Mayor cried, aghast.

"My lord, if you please," the Waldgrave answered coldly. "But do you consent?"

Hofman looked blanker than ever.

"Four?" he stammered.

"Precisely; four," the young lord answered.

"But who? I do not know them," the Mayor faltered. The Waldgrave shook his head gently.

"That is your concern, Burgomaster," he said, with a smile. "In forty-eight hours much may be done."

Hofman's hair stood on end. The thought of the crowd in the market-place, the thought of the reception he would have, if he assented to such terms, gave him courage.

"I will consult with my colleagues," he said at last, with a great gulp.

"I am afraid that you will not have the opportunity," the Waldgrave rejoined, in a peculiarly suave tone. "Until the four are given up to us, we prefer to take

care of you and the learned Minister. I see you have brought two or three friends with you; they will serve to convey what has passed to the town. And I doubt not that within a few hours we shall be able to release you."

Master Hofman fell a trembling.

"My lord," he cried, between tears and rage, "my privileges!"

"Master Mayor," the Waldgrave answered, with a sudden snap and snarl, which showed his strong white teeth, "*my dead servants.*"

After that there was no more to be said. The Burgomaster shrank back with a white face, and though Dietz, with rage burning in his salloy cheeks, cried "woe to him" who separated the shepherd from the sheep, and would have added half-a-dozen like texts, old Jacob cut him short by dropping his halberd on his toes and promptly removing him and the quavering Burgomaster to strong quarters in the tower. Meanwhile the other members of the party were marched nothing loth to the steps, and despatched through the gate with the same formality which had surprised us on our arrival.

Then for a few moments I was happy, in spite of doubts and forebodings, for the moment the room was cleared of servants, my lady came down from her place, and with tears in her eyes, laid her hand on my rough shoulder, and thanked me, saying such things to me, and so sweetly, that though many a silken fool has

laughed at me, as little better than a clown for knowing no knee service, I knelt there and then before her, and rose tenfold more her servant than before. For of this I am sure, that if the great knew their power, we should hear no more of peasants' wars and Rainbow banners. A smile buys for them what gold will not for another. A word from their lips stands guerdon for a life, and a look for the service of the heart.

However, few die of happiness, and almost before I was off my knees I found a little bitter in the cup.

"Well, well," the Waldgrave said, with a comical laugh, and I saw my lady blush, "these are fine doings. But next time you go to battle, Martin, remember, more haste less speed. Where would you have been now, I should like to know, without my cannon?"

"Perhaps still in Peter's forge," I answered bluntly. "But that puzzles me less, my lord," I continued, "than where you found your cannon."

He laughed in high good humour.

"So you are bit, are you? I warrant you thought we could do nothing without you. But the cannon, where do you think we did find them? You should know your own house."

"I know of none here," I answered slowly, "except the old cracked pieces the Landgrave Philip left."

"Well? And what if these be they?" he retorted, smiling.

"But they are cracked and foundered?" I cried warmly. "You could no more fire powder in them, my lord, than in the Countess's comfit-box!"

"But if you do not want to burn powder?" he replied. "If the sight of the muzzles be enough? What then, Master Wiseacre?"

"Why, then, my lord," I answered, drily, after a pause of astonishment, "I think the game is a risky one."

"Chut, you are jealous!" he said, laughing.

"And should be played very moderately."

"Chut," he said again, "you are jealous! Is he not, Rotha? He is jealous."

My lady looked at me laughing.

"I think he is a little," she said. "You must acknowledge, Martin," she continued, pleasantly, "that the Waldgrave has managed very well?"

I must have assented, however loth; but he saved me the trouble. He did not want to hear my opinion.

"Very well?" he exclaimed, with a laugh of pleasure; "I should think I have. Why, I have so brightened up your old serving-men that they make quite a tolerable garrison—mount guard, relieve, give the word and all like so many Swedes. Oh, I can tell you a little briskness and a few new fashions do no harm. But now," he continued, complacently, "since you are so clever, my friend, where is the risk?"

"If it becomes known in the town," I said, "that the cannon are dummies——"

"It is not known," he answered peremptorily.

"Still, under the circumstances," I persisted, "I should with submission have imposed terms less stringent. Especially I should not have detained Master Hofman, my lord, who is a timid man, making for peace. He has influence. Shut up here he cannot use it."

"But our terms will show that we are not afraid," the Waldgrave answered carelessly, "And that is everything."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Chut!" he said, half in annoyance and half in good humour. "Depend upon it, there is nothing like putting a bold face on things. That is my policy. But the truth is you are jealous, my friend—jealous of my excellent generalship; but for which I verily believe you would be decorating a gallows in the market-place at this moment. Come, fair cousin," he added, gleefully, turning from me and snatching up my lady's gloves and handing them to her, "let us out. Let us go and look down at our conquest, and leave this green-eyed fellow to rub his bruises."

My lady looked at me kindly and laughed. Still she assented, and my chance was gone. It was my place now to hold the door with lowered head, not to argue. And I did so. After all I had been well treated. I had spoken boldly and been heard.

For some time after the sound of their voices had died away on the stairs, I stood still. The room was quiet and I felt blank and purposeless. In the first moments of return every-day duties had an air of dullness and staleness. I thought of one after another, but had not yet brought myself to the point of moving, when a hand, raising the latch of one of the inner doors, effectually roused me. I turned and saw Fräulein Anna gliding in. She did not speak at once, but came towards me as she had a way of coming—close up before she spoke. It had more than once disturbed me. It did so now.

“Well, Master Martin,” she said at last, in her mild spiteful tone, “I hope you are satisfied with your work; I hope my lord’s service may suit you as well as my lady’s.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRIDE OF YOUTH.

BUT I am not going to relate the talk we had, Fräulein Anna and I. I learned one thing, and one only, and that I can put very shortly. I saw my face as it were in a glass, and I was not pleased with the reflection. Listening to Fräulein Anna’s biting hints and sidelong speeches—she did not spare them—I recognized that I was jealous; that the ascendancy the young lord had gained with my lady and in the castle

did not please me; and that if I would not make a fool of myself and step out of my place, I must take myself roundly to task. Much might be forgiven to Fräulein Anna, who saw the quiet realm wherein she had reigned invaded, and the friend she had gained won from her in an hour. But her case differed from mine. I was a servant, and woe to me if I forgot my place!

Perhaps, also, it gave me pleasure to find my uneasiness shared. At any rate, I felt better after that, and a message from my lady, bidding me rest my head and do nothing for the day, comforted me still further. I went out, and finding the terrace quiet, and deserted by all except the sentry at the wicket, I sat down on one of the stone seats which overlook the town and there began to think. The sun was behind a cloud and the air was fresh and cool, and I presently fell asleep with my head on my arms.

While I slept my lady and the Waldgrave came and began to walk up and down the terrace, and gradually little bits of their talk slid into my dreams, until I found myself listening to them between sleeping and waking. The Waldgrave was doing most of the speaking, in the boyish, confident tone which suited him; presently I heard him say—

“The whole art of war is changed, fair cousin. I had it from one who knows, Bernard of Weimar. The heavy battalions, the great masses, the slow movements,

the system invented by the great Captain of Cordova are gone. Breitenfeld was their death-blow."

"Yet my uncle was a great commander," my lady said, with a little touch of impatience in her tone.

"Of the old school."

I heard her laugh.

"You speak as if you had been a soldier for a score of years, Rupert," she said.

"Age is not experience," he answered hardily. "That is the mistake. How old was Alexander when he conquered Egypt? Twenty-three, cousin, and I am twenty-three. How old was the Emperor Augustus when he became Consul of Rome? Nineteen. How old was Henry of England when he conquered France? Twenty-seven. And Charles the Fifth at Pavia? Twenty-five."

"Sceptres are easy leading-staves," my lady answered deftly. "All these were kings, or the like."

"Then take Don John at Lepanto. He, too, was but twenty-five."

"A king's son," my lady replied quickly.

"Then I will give you one to whom you can make no objection," he answered in a tone of triumph: "Gaston de Foix, the Thunderbolt of Italy. He who conquered at Como, at Milan, at Ravenna. How old was he when he died, leaving a name never to be forgotten in arms? Twenty-three, fair cousin. And I am twenty-three."

"But then you are not Gaston de Foix," my lady retorted, laughter bubbling to her lips; "nor a king's nephew."

"But I may be."

"What? A king's nephew?" the Countess answered, laughing outright. "Pray where is the king's niece?"

"King's niece?" he exclaimed reproachfully—and I doubt not with a kind look at her, and a movement as if he would have paid her for her sauciness. "You know I want no king's niece. There is no king's niece in the world so sweet to my taste, so fair, or so gracious as the cousin I have been fortunate enough to serve during the last few days; and that I will maintain against the world."

"So here is my glove!" my lady answered gaily, finishing the speech for him. "Very prettily said, Rupert. I make you a thousand curtsies. But a truce to compliments. Tell me more."

He needed no second bidding; though I think that she would have listened without displeasure to another pretty speech, and an older man would certainly have made one. But he was full of the future and fame—and himself. He had never had such a listener before, and he poured forth his hopes and aspirations, as he strode up and down, so gallant of figure and frank of face that it was impossible not to feel with him. He was going to do this; he was going to do that. He

would make the name of Rupert of Weimar stand with that of Bernard. Never was such a time for enterprise. Gustavus Adolphus, with Sweden and North Germany at his back, was at Munich; Bavaria, Franconia, and the Rhine Bishoprics were at his feet. The hereditary dominions of the Empire, Austria, Silesia, Moravia, with Bohemia, Hungary, and the Tyrol, must soon be his. Their conquest was certain. Then would come the division of the spoil. The House of Weimar, which had suffered more in the Protestant cause than any other princely house of Germany, which had resigned for its sake the Electoral throne and the rights of primogeniture, would stand foremost for reward.

"And which kingdom shall you choose?" my lady asked, with a twinkle in her eye which belied her gravity. "Bohemia or Hungary? or Bavaria? Munich I am told is a pleasant capital."

"You are laughing at me!" he cried, a little hurt.

"Forgive me," she said, changing her tone so prettily that he was appeased on the instant. "But, speaking soberly, are you not curing the skin before the bear is dead? The great Wallenstein is said to be collecting an army in Bohemia, and if the latest rumour is to be believed, he has already driven out the Saxons and retaken Prague. The tide of conquest seems already to be turning."

"We shall see," the Waldgrave answered confidently.

"Very well," my lady replied. "But, besides, is there not a proverb about the lion's share? Will the Lion of the North forego his?"

"We shall make him," the young lord answered. "He goes as far as we wish and no farther. Without German allies he could not maintain his footing for a month."

"Germany should blush to need his help," my lady said warmly.

"Never mind. Better times are coming," he answered. "And soon, I hope."

With that they moved out of hearing, crossing to the other side of the court and beginning to walk up and down there; and I heard no more. But I had heard enough to enable me to arrive at two or three conclusions. For one thing I felt jealous no longer. My lady's tone when she spoke to the Waldgrave convinced me that whatever the future might bring forth, she regarded him in the present with liking, and some pride perhaps, but with no love worthy of the name. A woman, she took pleasure in his handsome looks and gallant bearing; she was fond of listening to his aspirations. But the former pleased her eye without touching her heart, and the latter never for a moment carried her away.

I was glad to be sure of this, because I discerned something lacking on his side. It was "Rotha," "sweet

cousin," "fair cousin," too soon with him. He felt no reverence, suffered no pangs, trembled under no misgivings, sank under no sense of unworthiness. He thought that all was to be had for pleasant words and the asking. Heritzburg seemed a rustic place to him, and my lady's life so dull and uneventful, my lady herself so little of a goddess, that he deemed himself above all risk of refusal. A little difficulty, a little doubt, the appearance of a rival, might awaken real love. But it was not in him now. He felt only a passing fancy, the light offspring of propinquity and youth.

But how, it may be asked, was I so wise that, from a few sentences heard between sleeping and waking, I could gather all this, and draw as many inferences from a laugh as Fräulein Anna Max from a page of crabbed Latin? The question put to me then, as I sat day-dreaming over Heritzburg, might have posed me. I am clear enough about it now. I could answer it if I chose. But a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, and a horse with eyes needs neither one nor the other.

Presently I saw Fräulein Anna come out and go sliding along one side of the court to gain another door. She had a great book under her arm and blinked like an owl in the sunshine, and would have run against my lady if the Waldgrave had not called out good-humouredly. She shot away at that with a show of excessive haste, and was in the act of disappearing like

a near-sighted rabbit, when my lady called to her pleasantly to come back.

She came slowly, hugging the great book, and with her lips pursed tightly. I fancy she had been sitting at a window watching my lady and her companion, and that every laugh which rose to her ears, every merry word, nay the very sunshine in which they walked, while she sat in the dull room with her unread book before her, wounded her.

"What have you been doing, Anna?" my lady asked kindly.

"I have been reading the 'Praise of Folly,'" Fräulein Max answered primly. "I am going to my Voetius now."

"It is such a fine day," my lady pleaded.

"I never miss my Voetius," Fräulein answered stiffly.

The Waldgrave looked at her quizzically, with scarcely veiled contempt.

"Voetius?" he said. "What is that? You excite my curiosity."

Perhaps it was the contrast between them, between his strength and comeliness and her weak figure and pale frowning face, that moved me; but I know that as he said that, I felt a sudden pity for her. And she, I think, for herself. She reddened and looked down and seemed to go smaller. Scholarship is a fine thing. I have heard Fräulein Anna herself say that knowledge is power. But I never yet saw a bookworm that did

not pale his fires before a soldier of fortune, nor a scholar that did not follow the courtier and the ruffler with eyes of envy.

Perhaps my lady felt as I did, for she came to the rescue. "You are too bad," she said. "Fräulein Anna is my friend, and I will not have her teased. As for Voetius, he is a writer of learning, and you would know more about many things, if you could read his works, sir."

"Do you read them?" he asked.

"I do!" she answered, blushing brightly.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, staring at her freely and affecting to be astonished. "Well, all I can say is that you do not look like it!"

My lady fired up at that. I think she felt for her friend. "I do not thank you," she said sharply. "A truce to such compliments, if you please. Anna," she continued, "have you been to see this poor girl from the town?"

"No, I have not," Fräulein Max answered.

"She has come, has she not?"

"And gone, I believe—to the stables!" And Fräulein Anna laughed spitefully. "She is used to camp life, I suppose, and prefers them."

"But that is not right," my lady said, looking annoyed. She turned round and called to me. "Martin," she said, "come here. This girl—the papist from the

town—why has she not been brought to the women's quarters in the house?"

I answered that I did not know; that she should have been.

"We will go and see," my lady answered, nodding her head in a way that promised trouble should any one be found in fault. And without a moment's hesitation she led the way to the inner court, the Waldgrave walking beside her, and Fräulein Anna following a pace or two behind. The latter still hugged her book, and her face wore a look of secret anticipation. I took on myself to go too, and followed at a respectful distance, my mind in a ferment.

The stable court at Heritzburg is small. The rays of the sun even at noon scarcely warm it, and a shadow seemed to fall on our party as we entered. Two grooms, not on guard, were going about their ordinary duties. They started on seeing my lady, who seldom entered that part without notice; and hastened to do reverence to her.

"Where is the girl who was brought here from the town?" she said, in a peremptory tone.

The men looked at one another, scared by her presence, yet not knowing what was amiss. Then one said, "Please your excellency, she is in the room over the granary."

"She should be in the house, not here," my lady answered harshly. "Take me to her."

The man stared, and the Waldgrave, seeing his look of astonishment, interposed, murmuring that perhaps the place was scarcely fit.

"For me?" my lady said, cutting him short, with a high look which reminded me of her uncle, Count Tilly. "You forget, sir cousin, that I am not a woman only, but mistress here. Ignorance, which may be seemly in a woman, does not become me. Lead on, my man."

The fellow led the way up a flight of outside steps which gave access to the upper granary floor; and my lady followed, rejecting the Waldgrave's hand and gazing with an unmoved eye at the unfenced edge on her left; for the stairs had no rail. At the top the groom opened the door and squeezed himself aside, and my lady entered. The Waldgrave had given place to Fräulein Anna—whom desire to see what would happen had blinded to the risks of the stairs—and she was not slow to follow. The young lord and I pressed in a pace behind.

"This is not a fit place for a maiden!" I heard my lady say severely; and then she stopped. That was before I could see inside. The sudden pause came as I entered. The loft was dark, the unglazed windows being shuttered; but my eyes are good, and I knew the place, and saw at once--what my lady had seen, I

think, at a second glance only—that the man beside whom the girl was kneeling—or had been kneeling, for as I entered she rose to her feet with a word of alarm—was bandaged from his chin to his crown, was helpless and maundering, talking strange nonsense, and rolling his head restlessly from side to side.

“Why, you are a child!” my lady said; and this time her voice was soft and low and full of surprise. “Who is this?” she continued, pointing to the man; who never ceased to babble and move.

“It is Steve, my lady,” I said. “He was hurt below, in the town, and the girl has been nursing him. I suppose she—I think no one told her to go elsewhere,” I added by way of apology for her.

“Where could she be better?” my lady said in a low voice, to my surprise. “Child,” she continued gently, “come here. Do not be afraid.”

The girl had shrunk back at the sound of my lady’s first words, or at sight of so large a company, and had taken her stand on the farther side of Steve, where she crouched trembling and looking at us with a terrified face. Hearing herself summoned, she came slowly and timidly forward, the little boy who had run to her holding her hand, and hiding his face in her skirts.

“I am the countess,” my lady said, looking at her closely, but with kindness, “and I have come to see how you fare.”

It was a hard moment for the girl, but she did the very best thing she could have done, and one that commended her to my lady's heart for ever. For, bursting into tears—I doubt not the sound of a woman's voice speaking mildly to her touched her heart—she dropped on her knees before the countess and kissed her hand, sobbing piteous words of thankfulness and appeal.

“Chut! chut!” my lady said, a little tremor in her own voice. “You are safe now. Be comforted. You shall be protected here, whatever betide. But you have lost your father? Yes, I remember, child. Well, it is over now. You are quite safe. See, this gentleman shall be your champion. And Martin there. He is a match for any two. Tell me your name.”

“Marie—Marie Wort.” The girl suppressed her tears with an effort.

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen, please your excellency.”

“And where were you born, Marie?”

“At Munich, in Bavaria.”

“You are a Romanist, I hear?”

“If it please your excellency.”

“It does not please me at all,” my lady answered promptly; but she said it with so much mildness that Marie's eyes filled again. “I warn you, we shall try to convert you—by kindness. So you are nursing this

poor fellow?" And with that my lady went up to Steve, and touched his hand and spoke to him. But he did not know her, and she stepped back, looking grave.

"The fever is on him now," Marie said timidly. "He is at his worst; but he will be better by-and-by, if your excellency pleases."

"He is fortunate in his nurse," my lady answered, gazing searchingly at the other's pale face. "Will you stay with him, child, or would you not rather come into the house, where my women could take care of you, and you would be more comfortable?"

A look of distress flickered in the girl's eyes. She hesitated and looked down, colouring painfully. I dare say that with feminine tact she knew that my lady even now thought it scarcely proper for her to be there—in a house where only the men about the stable lived. But she found her answer.

"He was hurt trying to protect me," she murmured, in a low voice.

My lady nodded. "Very well," she said; and I saw that she was not displeased. "You shall stay with him. I will see you are taken care of. Come, Rupert, I think we have seen enough."

She signed to us to go before her, and we all went out, and she closed the door. At the head of the steps, when the Waldgrave offered her his hand, she waved it off, and stood.

"Bring me a hammer and a nail," she cried, in a clear voice.

Three or four men, nearly half our garrison, had collected below, hearing where we were. One of these ran and fetched what she called for, while we all waited and wondered what she meant. I took the hammer and nail from the man and went up again with them.

"Give me my glove," she said, turning abruptly to the Waldgrave.

He had possessed himself of one in the course of the conversation I have partly detailed, and no doubt he did not give it up very willingly. But there was no refusing her under the circumstances.

"Hold it against the door!" she said.

He obeyed, and with her own hands she drove the nail through the glove, pinning it to the middle of the door. Then she turned with a little colour in her face.

"That is my room!" she said, with a ring of menace in her tone. "Let no one presume to enter it. And have a care, men! Whatever is wanted inside, place at the threshold and begone."

Then she came down, followed by the Waldgrave, and walked through the middle of us and went back to the terrace, with Fräulein Anna at her heels. The Waldgrave lingered a moment to look at a sick horse, and I to give an order. When we reached the terrace

court a few minutes later, we found my lady walking up and down alone in the sunshine.

"Why, where is the learned Anna?" the Waldgrave said.

"She is gone to amuse herself," my lady answered, laughing. "Voetius is put aside for the moment in favour of Master Dietz!"

"No?" the young lord exclaimed, in a tone of extreme surprise. "That yellow-faced atomy? She is not in love with him?"

"No, sir, certainly not."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, I think she is a little jealous," my lady answered with a smile. "We have been so long colloquing with a papist, Anna thinks some amends are due to the Church. And she is gone to make them. At any rate, she asked me a few minutes ago if she might pay a visit to Dietz. 'For what purpose?' I said. 'To discuss a point with him,' she answered. So I told her to go, if she liked, and by this time I don't doubt that they are hard at it."

"Over Voetius?" my lord said, laughing.

"No, sir, you are wrong," my lady answered gaily. "Beza more probably, or Calvin. You know little of either, I expect. I do not wonder that Anna is driven to seek more improving company."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

ALL that day the town remained quiet, and all day the Waldgrave and my lady walked to and fro in the sunshine; or my lady sat working on one of the stone seats, while he built castles in the air, which she knocked down with a sly word or a merry glance. Fräulein Anna, always with the big book, flitted from door to door, like an unquiet spirit. The sentries dozed at their posts, old Jacob in his chair in the guard-room, the cannons under their breech-clouts. If this could be said to be a state of siege, it was the most gentle and joyous one paladin ever shared or mistress imagined.

But no message reached us from the town, and that disturbed me. Half a dozen times I went to the wall and, leaning over it, listened. Each time I came away satisfied. All seemed quiet; the market-place rather fuller perhaps than on common days, the hum of life more steady and persistent; but neither to any great extent. Despite this I could not shake off a feeling of uneasiness. I remembered certain faces I had seen in the town, grim faces lurking in corners, seen over men's shoulders or through half-open doors; and a dog barking startled me, the shadow of a crow flying over the court made me jump a yard.

Night only added to my nervousness. I doubled

all the guards, stationing two men at the town-wicket and two at the stable-gate, which leads to the bridge. And not content with these precautions, though the Waldgrave laughed at them and me, I got out of bed three times in the night, and went the round to assure myself that the men were at their posts.

When morning came without mishap, but also without bringing any overture from the town, the Waldgrave laughed still more loudly. But my lady looked grave. I did not dare to interfere or give advice—having been once admitted to say my say—but I felt that it would be a serious thing if the forty-eight hours elapsed and the town refused to make amends. My lady felt this too, I think; and by-and-by she held a council with the Waldgrave; and about midday my lord came to me, and with a somewhat wry face bade me have the prisoners conducted to the parlour.

He sent me at the same time on an errand to another part of the castle, and so I cannot say what passed. I believe my lady dealt with the two very firmly; reiterating her judgment of the day before, and only adding that in clemency she had thought better of imprisoning them, and would now suffer them to go to their homes, in the hope that they would use their influence to save the town from worse trouble.

I met the two crossing the terrace on their way to the gate and was struck by something peculiar in their

aspect. Master Hofman was all of a tremble with excitement and eagerness to be gone. His fat, half-moon of a face shone with anxiety. He stuttered when he tried to give me good day as I passed; and he seemed to have eyes only for the gate, dragging his smaller companion along by the arm, and more than once whispering in his ear as if to adjure him not to waste a moment.

The little Minister, on the other hand, hung back and marched slowly, his face wearing a look of triumph which showed very plainly—or so I construed it—that he regarded his release in the light of a victory. His sallow cheeks were flushed, and his eyes gleamed spitefully as he looked from side to side. He held himself bolt upright, with a square Bible clasped to his breast, and as he passed me he could not refrain from a characteristic outbreak. Doubtless to bridle himself before my lady had almost choked him. He laughed in my face. “Dry bones!” he cackled. “And mouths that speak not!”

“Speak plainly yourself, Master Dietz,” I answered, for I have never thought ministers more than other men. “Then perhaps I shall be able to understand you.”

“Sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!” he replied, cracking his fingers in my face and laughing triumphantly.

He would have said more, I imagine; but at that

moment the Burgomaster fell bodily upon him, and drove him by main force through the gate which had been opened. Outside even, he made some attempts to return and defy us, crying out "Whited sepulchres!" and the like. But the steps were narrow and steep, and Hofman stood like a feather bed in the way, and presently he desisted. The two stumbled down together and we saw no more of them.

The men about me laughed; but I had reason for thinking it far from a laughing matter, and I hastened into the house that I might tell my lady. When I entered the parlour, however, where I found her with the Waldgrave and Fräulein Anna, she held up her hand to check me. She and the Waldgrave were laughing, and Fräulein Anna, half shy and half sullen, was leaning against the table looking at the floor, with her cheeks red.

"Come," my lady was saying, "you were with him half an hour, Anna. You can surely tell us what you talked about. Don't be afraid of Martin. He knows all our secrets."

"Or perhaps we are indiscreet," the Waldgrave said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye. "When a young lady visits a gentleman in captivity, the conversation must needs be of a tender nature."

"That shows, sir, that you know little about it," Fräulein Anna cried indignantly. "We talked of Voetius."

"Dear me!" my lord said. "Then Master Dietz knows Voetius."

"He does not. He said he considered such pagan learning useless," Fräulein Anna answered, rapidly warming with her subject. "That it tended to pride, and puffed up instead of giving grace. I said he only saw one side of the matter."

"In that resembling me," my lord murmured.

My lady repressed him with a look.

"Yes," she said pleasantly. "And what then, Anna?"

"And that he might be wrong in this, as in other matters. He asked me what other matters," Fräulein Max continued, growing voluble, and almost confident, as she reviewed the scene. "I said, the inferiority of women to men. He said, yes, he maintained that, following Peter Martyr. Well, I said he was wrong, and so was Peter Martyr. 'But you do not convince me,' he answered. 'You say I am wrong on this as on other points. Cite a point, then, on which I am wrong.' 'You know no Greek, you know no Oriental tongue, you know no Hebrew!' I retorted. 'All pagan learning,' he said. 'Cite a point on which I am wrong. I am not often wrong. Cite a point on which I am confessedly wrong.' So"—Fräulein Anna laughed a little, excited laugh of pleasure—"I thought I would take him at his word, and I said, 'Will you abide by that?"

If I show you that you have been wrong, that you have been deceived only to-day, will you acknowledge that Peter Martyr was wrong?' He said, oh yes, he would, if I could convince him. I said, 'Exemplum! You came here because you were afraid of our cannon. Granted? Yes. Well, our cannon are cracked. They are *brutum fulmen*—an empty threat. We could not fire them, if we would. So there, you see, you were wrong.' Well, on that——"

But what Master Dietz said on that, and what she answered, we never knew, for the Waldgrave bounding from the table, with a crash which shook the room, swore a very pagan oath.

"Himmel!" he cried in a voice of passion. "The woman has ruined us! Do you understand, Countess? She has told them! And they have taken the news to the town!"

"I do understand," my lady said softly, but with a paling face. "By this time it is known."

"Known! Yes; and our shutting up that poisonous little snake will only make him the more bitter!" my lord answered, striking the table a great blow in his wrath. "We are undone! Oh, you idiot, you idiot!" and breaking off suddenly he turned to Fraulein Max, who stood weeping and trembling by the table. "Why did you do it?"

"Hush!" my lady said nobly; and she put her arm

round Fräulein Anna. "She is so absent. It was my fault. I should not have let her see them. Besides, she did not know that they were going to be released. And it is done now, and cannot be undone. The question is, what ought we to do?"

"Yes, what?" my lord cried bitterly, with a glance at the culprit, which showed that he was very far from forgiving her. "I am sure I do not know, any more than the dog there!"

My lady looked at me anxiously.

"Well, Martin," she said, "what do you say?"

But I had nothing to say. I felt myself at a loss. I knew, better than any of them, the Minister's sour nature, and had seen with my own eyes the state of resentment and rage in which he had left us. His news would fall like a spark dropped on powder. The town, brooding in gloom, foreboding, and terror, would in a moment blaze into fierce wrath. Every ruffian who had felt his neck endangered by the Countess's sentence, every family that had lost a member in the late riot, every one who had an old grievance to avenge, or a new object to gain, would in an hour be in arms; while those whose advantage lay commonly on the side of order might stand aloof now—some at the instance of Dietz, and others through timidity and that fear of a mob which exists in the mind of every burgher. What, then, had we to expect? My lady must look to have

her authority flouted—that for certain. But would the matter end with that? Would the disorder stop at the foot of the steps?

“I think we are safe enough here, if your excellency asks me,” I said, after a moment’s thought. “A dozen men could hold the wicket-gate against a thousand.”

“Safe!” my lady cried in a tone of indignation. “Yes, Martin, safe! But what of those who look to me for protection? Am I to stand by and see the law defied? Am I to——” She paused. “What is that?” she said in a different tone, raising her hand for silence.

She listened, and we listened, looking at one another with meaning eyes; and in a moment she had her answer. Through the open windows, with the air and sunshine came a sound which rose and fell at intervals. It was the noise of distant cheering. Full and deep, leaping up again and again, in insolent mockery and defiance, it reached us where we stood in the quiet room, and told us that all was known. While we still listened, another sound, nearer at hand, broke the inner stillness of the house—the tramp of a hurrying foot on the stairs. Old Jacob thrust in his head and looked at me.

“You can speak,” I said.

“There is something wrong below,” he muttered, abashed at finding himself in the presence.

“We know it, Jacob,” said my lady, bravely. “We are considering how to right it. In the mean time, do

you go to the gates, my friend, and see that they are well guarded."

"We could send to Hesse-Cassel," the Waldgrave suggested, when we were again alone.

"It would be useless," my lady answered. "The Landgrave is at Munich with the King of Sweden; so is Leuchtenstein."

"If Leuchtenstein were only at home——"

"Ah!" the Countess answered with a touch of impatience; "but then he is not. If he were—well, even he could scarcely make troops where there are none."

"There are generally some to be hired," the Waldgrave answered. "What if we send to Halle, or Weimar, and inquire? A couple of hundred pikes would settle the matter."

"God forbid!" my lady answered with a shudder. "I have heard enough of the doings of such soldiers. The town has not deserved that."

The Waldgrave looked at me, and slightly shrugged his shoulders; as much as to say that my lady was impracticable. But I, agreeing with every word she said, only loved her the more, and could make him no answer, even if my duty had permitted it. I hastened to suggest that, the castle being safe, the better plan was to wait, keeping on our guard, and see what happened; which, indeed, seemed also to be the only course open to us.

My lady saw this and agreed. Then I withdrew, to spend the rest of the day in a kind of feverish march between the one gate and the other. We could muster no more than twelve effective men, even with the Waldgrave; and though three might suffice for the bare defence of the place, which had only two assailable points, the paucity of our numbers kept me in perpetual fear. I knew my lady's proud nature so well that I dreaded humiliation for her as I might have feared death for another; with terror and shrinking, which made the possibility of her capture by the malcontents an abiding misery, a nightmare which would neither let me rest nor sleep.

My lord soon recovered his spirits. In an hour or two he was as buoyant and cheerful as before, dividing the blame of the *contretemps* between Fräulein Anna and myself, and hinting that if he had been left to manage the matter, the guilty would have suffered, and Dietz not gone scot-free. But I trembled. I did not see how we could be surprised; I thought it improbable that the townsfolk would try to effect anything against us; impossible that they should succeed. Yet, when the stern swell of one of Luther's hymns rose from the town at sunset, and I remembered how easily men's hearts were inflamed by those strains; again, when a huge bonfire in the market-place dispelled the night, and for hours kept the town restless and waking, I

shuddered, fearing I knew not what. I will answer for it, my lady, who never ceased to wear a cheerful countenance, did not sleep that night one half so ill as I.

And yet I was caught napping. A little before day-break, when all was quiet, I went to take an hour's rest. I had lain down, and, as far as I could judge later, had just fallen into a doze, when a tremendous shock, which made the very walls round me tremble, drew me to my feet as if a giant hand had plucked me from the bed. A dull, crashing sound, mingled with the shiver of falling glass, still filled the air. For a few seconds I stood trembling and bewildered in the middle of the room—in the state of disorder natural to a man rudely awakened. I could not on the instant collect myself or comprehend what had happened. Then, in a flash, the fears of the day returned to my mind, and springing to the door, half-dressed as I was, I ran down to the courtyard.

Some of the servants were already there—a white-cheeked, panic-stricken group of men and women intermixed—but, for a moment, I could get no answer to my questions. All spoke at once, none knew. Then—it was just growing light—from the direction of the stable-gate a man came running out of the dusk with a half-pike on his shoulder.

“Quick!” he cried. “This way, here, give me a musket.”

"What is it?" I answered, seizing him by the arm.

"They have blown up the bridge—the bridge over the ravine!" he replied, panting. "Quick, a gun! A part is left, and they are hacking it down!"

In a moment I saw all. "To your posts!" I shouted. "And the women into the house! See to the wicket-gate, Jacob, and do not leave it!" Then I sprang into the guard-house and snatched down a carbine, three or four of which hung loaded in the loops. The sentry who had brought the news seized another, and we ran together through the stable court and to the gate, four or five of the servants following us.

Elsewhere it was growing light. Here a thick cloud of smoke and dust still hung in the air, with a stifling reek of powder. But looking through one of the loopholes in the gate, I was able to discern that the farther end of the bridge which spanned the ravine was gone—or gone in part. The right-hand wall, with three or four feet of the roadway, still hung in air, but half a dozen men, whose figures loomed indistinctly through a haze of dust and gloom, were working at it furiously, demolishing it with bars and pickaxes.

At that sight I fell into a rage. I saw in a flash what would happen if the bridge sank and we were cut off from all exit except through the town-gate. The dastardly nature of the surprise and the fiendish energy

of the men combined to madden me. I gave no warning and cried out no word, but thrusting my weapon through the loophole aimed at the nearest worker, and fired.

The man dropped his tool and threw up his arms, staggered forward a couple of paces, and fell sheer over the broken edge into the gulf. His fellows stood a moment in terror, looking after him, but the sentry who had warned me fired through the other loophole, and that started them. They flung down their tools and bolted like so many rabbits. The smoke of the carbine was scarce out of the muzzle, before the bridge, or what remained of it, was clear.

I turned round and found the Waldgrave at my elbow. "Well done!" he said heartily. "That will teach the rascals a lesson!"

I was trembling in every limb with excitement, but before I answered him, I handed my gun to one of the men who had followed me. "Load," I said, "and if a man comes near the bridge, shoot him down. Keep your eye on the bridge, and do nothing else until I come back."

Then I walked away through the stable-court with the Waldgrave; who looked at me curiously, "You were only just in time," he said.

"Only just," I muttered.

"There is enough left for a horse to cross."

"Yes," I answered, "to-day."

"Why to-day?" he asked, still looking at me. I think he was surprised to see me so much moved.

"Because the rest will be blown up to-night," I answered bluntly. "Or may be. How can we guard it in the dark? It is fifty paces from the gate. We cannot risk men there—with our numbers."

"Still it may not be," he said. "We must keep a sharp look-out."

"But if it *is*?" I answered, halting suddenly, and looking him full in the face. "If it is, my lord? We are provisioned for a week. It is not autumn, you see. Then the pickle tubs would be full, the larder stocked, the rafters groaning, the still-room supplied. But it is May, and there is little left. The last three days we have been thinking of other things than provisions; and we have thirty mouths to feed."

The Waldgrave's face fell. "I had not thought of that," he said. "The bridge gone, they may starve us, you mean?"

"Into submission to whatever terms they please, my lord," I answered. "We are too few to cut our way through the town. Other way of escape there would be none."

"What do you advise, then?" he asked, drawing me aside with a flustered air. "Flight?"

"A horse might cross the bridge to-day," I said thoughtfully.

"But any terms would be better than that!" he replied with vehemence.

"What if they demand the expulsion of the Catholic girl, my lord, whom the Countess has taken under her protection?"

"They will not!" he said positively.

"They may," I persisted.

"Then we will not give her up."

"But the alternative—starvation?"

"Pooh! It will not come to that!" he answered. "You leap before you reach the stile."

"Because, my lord, there will be no leaping if we do reach it."

"Nonsense!" he cried masterfully. "Something must be risked. To give up a strong place like this to a parcel of clod-hoppers—it is absurd! At the worst we could parley."

"I do not think my lady would consent to parley," I said.

"I shall say nothing to her about it," he answered. "She is no judge of such things."

I had been thinking all the while that he had that in his mind, and on the spot I answered him squarely that I would not consent. "My lady must know all," I said, "and decide for herself, my lord."

He started, looking at me with his face very red. "Why, man," he said, "would you browbeat me?"

"No, my lord," I said firmly, "but my lady must know."

"You are insolent!" he cried, in a passion. "You forget yourself, man, and that your mistress has placed me in command here!"

"I forget nothing, my lord," I answered, waxing firmer. "What I remember is that she is my mistress."

He glared at me a moment, his face dark with anger, and then with a contemptuous gesture he left me and walked twice or thrice across the court. Doubtless the air did him good, for presently he came back to me. "You are an ill-bred meddler!" he said with his head high, "and I shall remember it. But for the present have your way. I will tell the Countess and take her opinion."

He went into the house to do it, and I waited patiently in the courtyard, watching the sun rise and all the roofs grow red; listening to the twittering of the birds, and wondering what the answer would be. I had not set myself against him without misgiving, for in a little while all might be in his hands. But fear for my mistress outweighed fears on my own account; and in the thought of her shame, should she awake some morning and find herself trapped, I lost thought of my own interest and advancement. I have heard it said that he builds best for himself who builds for another. It was so on this occasion.

He came back presently, looking thoughtful, as if my lady had talked to him very freely, and shown him a side of her character that had escaped him. The anger was clean gone from his face, and he spoke to me without embarrassment; in apparent forgetfulness that there had been any difference between us. Nor did I ever find him bear malice long.

"The Countess decides to go," he said, "either to Cassel or Frankfort, according to the state of the roads. She will take with her Fräulein Max, her two women, and the Catholic girl, and as many men as you can horse. She thinks she may safely leave the castle in charge of old Jacob and Franz, with a letter directed to the Burgomaster and council, throwing the responsibility for its custody on them. When do you think we should start?"

"Soon after dark this evening," I answered, "if my lady pleases."

"Then that decides it," he replied carelessly, the dawn of a new plan and new prospects lighting up his handsome face. "See to it, will you?"

CHAPTER IX.

WALNUTS OF GOLD.

NIGHT is like a lady's riding-mask, which gives to the most familiar features a strange and uncanny aspect. When to night are added silence and alarm, and that

worst burden of all, responsibility—responsibility where a broken twig may mean a shot, and a rolling stone capture, where in a moment the evil is done—then you have a scene and a time to try the stoutest.

To walk boldly into a wall of darkness, relying on daylight knowledge, which says there is no wall; to step over the precipice on the faith of its depth being shadow—this demands nerve in those who are not used to the vagaries of night. But when the darkness may at any instant belch forth a sheet of flame; when every bush may hide a cowardly foe and every turn a pitfall, and there are women in company and helpless children, then a man had need to be an old soldier or forest-born, if he would keep his head cool, and tell one horse from another by the sound of its hoofs.

We started about eight, and started well. The Waldgrave and half a dozen men crossed first on foot, and took post to protect the farther end of the bridge. Then I led over the horses, beginning with the four sumpter beasts. Satisfied after this that the arch remained uninjured, and that there was room and to spare, I told my lady, and she rode over by herself on Pushka. Marie Wort tripped after her with the child in her arms. Fräulein Max I carried. My lady's women crossed hand in hand. Then the rest. So like a troop of ghosts or shadows, with hardly a word spoken or an order given, we flitted into the darkness, and met under

the trees, where those who had not yet mounted got to horse. Led by young Jacob, who knew every path in the valley and could find his way blindfold, we struck away from the road without delay, and taking lanes and tracks which ran beside it, presently hit it again a league or more beyond the town and far on the way.

That was a ride not to be forgotten. The night was dark. At a distance the dim lights of the town did not show. The valley in which we rode, and which grows straighter as it approaches the mouth and the river, seemed like a black box without a lid. The wind, laden with mysterious rustlings and the thousand sad noises of the night, blew in our faces. Now and then an owl hooted, or a branch creaked, or a horse stumbled and its rider railed at it. But for the most part we rode in silence, the women trembling and crossing themselves—as most of our people do to this day, when they are frightened—and the men riding wearily, with straining eyes and ears on the stretch.

Before we reached the ford, which lies nearly eight miles from the castle, the Waldgrave, who had his place beside my lady, began to talk; and then, if not before, I knew that *his* love for her was a poor thing. For, being in high spirits at the success of our plan—which he had come to consider *his* plan—and delighted to find himself again in the saddle with an adventure before him, he forgot that the matter must wear a dif-

ferent aspect in her eyes. She was leaving her home—the old rooms, the old books, the presses and stores, the duties, stately or simple, in which her life had been passed. And she was leaving it, not in the daylight, and with a safe and assured future before her, but by stealth and under cover of night, with a mind full of anxious questionings!

To my lord it seemed a fine thing to have the world before him; to know that all Germany beyond the Werra was convulsed by war, and a theatre wherein a bold man might look to play his part. But to a woman, however high-spirited, the knowledge was not reassuring. To one who was exchanging her own demesne and peace and plenty for a wandering life and dependence on the protection of men, it was the reverse.

So, while my lord talked gaily, my lady, I think, wept; doing that under cover of darkness and her mask, which she would never have done in the light. He talked on, planning and proposing; and where a true lover would have been quick to divine the woman's weakness, he felt no misgiving, thrilled with no sympathy. Then I knew that he lacked the subtle instinct which real love creates; which teaches the strong what it is the feeble dread, and gives a woman the daring of a man.

As we drew near the ford, I dropped back to see that all crossed safely. Pushka, I knew, would carry

my lady over, but some of the others were worse mounted. This brought me abreast of the Catholic girl, though the darkness was such that I recognized her only by the dark mass before her, which I knew to be the child. We had had some difficulty in separating her from Steve, and persuading her that the man ran no risk where he lay; otherwise she had behaved admirably. I did not speak to her, but when I saw the gleam of water before us, and heard the horses of the leaders begin to splash through the shallows, I leant over and took hold of the boy.

"You had better give him to me," I said gruffly. "You will have both hands free then. Keep your feet high, and hold by the pommel. If your horse begins to swim let its head loose."

I expected her to make a to-do about giving up the child; but she did not, and I lifted it to the withers of my horse. She muttered something in a tone which sounded grateful, and then we splashed on in silence, the horses putting one foot gingerly before the other; some sniffing the air with loud snorts and outstretched necks, and some stopping outright.

I rode on the upstream side of the girl, to break the force of the water. Not that the ford is dangerous in the daytime (it has been bridged these five years), but at night, and with so many horses, it was possible one or another might stray from the track; for the ford

is not straight, but slants across the stream. However, we all passed safely; and yet the crossing remains in my memory.

As I held the child before me—it was a gallant little thing, and clung to me without cry or word—I felt something rough round its neck. At the moment I was deep in the water, and I had no hand to spare. But by-and-by, as we rode out and began to clamber up the farther bank, I laid my hand on its neck, suspecting already what I should find.

I was not mistaken. Under my fingers lay the very necklace Peter had described to me with so much care! I could trace the shape and roughness of the walnuts. I could almost count them. Even of the length of the chain I could fairly judge. It was long enough to go twice round the child's neck.

As soon as I had made certain, I let it be, lest the child should cry out. I rode on, thinking hard. What, I wondered, had induced the girl to put the chain round its neck at that juncture? She had hidden it so carefully hitherto, that no eye but Peter's, so far as I could judge, had seen it. Why this carelessness now, then? Certainly it was dark, and, as far as eyes went, the chain was safe. But round her own neck, under her kerchief, where it had lain before, it was still safer. Why had she removed it?

We had topped the farther bank by this time, and

were riding slowly along the right-hand side of the river; but I was still turning this over in my mind, when I heard her on a sudden give a little gasp. I knew in a moment what it was. She had bethought her where the necklace was. I was not a whit surprised when she asked me in a tremulous tone to give her back the child.

"It is very well here," I said coldly, to try her.

"It will trouble you," she muttered faintly.

"I will say when it does," I answered.

She did not answer anything to that, but I heard her breathing hard, and knew that she was racking her brains for some excuse to get the child from me. For what if daylight came and I still rode with it, the necklace in full view? Or what if we stopped at some house and lights were brought? Or what, again, if I perceived the necklace and took possession of it!

This last idea so charmed me—I was in a grim humour—that my hand was on the necklace, almost before I knew what I was doing, feeling for the clasp which fastened it. Some fiend brought the clasp under my fingers in a twinkling. The necklace seemed to fall loose of its own accord. In a moment it was swinging and swaying in my hand. In another I had gathered it up and slid it into my pouch.

The trick was done so easily and so quickly that I think some devil must have helped me; the child never

moved or cried out, though it was old enough to take notice, and could even speak, as children of that age can speak—intelligibly to those who know them, gibberish to strangers.

I need not say that I never meant to steal a link of the thing. The temptation which moved me was the temptation to tease the girl. I thought this a good way of punishing her. I thought, first to torment her by making her think the necklace gone; and then to shame her by producing it, and giving it back to her with a dry word that should show her I understood her deceit.

So, even when the thing was done, and the chain snug in my pocket, I did not for a while repent, but hugged myself, and smiled under cover of the darkness. I carried the child a mile farther, and then handed it down to Marie, with an appearance of unconsciousness which it was not very hard to assume, since she could not see my face. But doubtless every yard of that mile had been a torture to her. I heard her sigh with relief as her arms closed round the boy. Then in a moment I knew that she had discovered her loss. She uttered a sobbing cry, and I heard her passing her hands through the child's clothing, while her breath came and went in gasps.

She plucked at her bridle so suddenly that those

who rode behind ran into us. I made way for them to pass.

"What is it?" I said roughly. "What is the matter?"

She muttered under her breath, with her hands still searching the child, that she had lost something.

"If you have, it is gone," I said bluntly. "You would hardly find a hayrick to-night. You must have dropped it coming through the ford?"

She did not answer, but I heard her begin to sob. And then for the first time I felt uncomfortable. I repented of what I had done. I wished with all my heart that the chain was round the child's neck again. "Come, come," I said awkwardly, "it was not of much value, I suppose. At any rate, it is no good crying over it."

She did not answer; she was still searching. I could hear what she was doing, though I could not see; there were trees overhead, and it was as much as I could do to make out her figure. At last I grew angry, partly with myself, partly with her. "Come," I said roughly, "we cannot stay here all night. We must be moving."

She assented meekly, and we rode on. But still I heard her crying softly; and she seemed to be hugging the child to her, as if, now the necklace was gone, she had nothing but the boy left. I tried to see the humour in the joke as I had seen it a few minutes before, but the sparkle had gone out of it. I felt I had been a

brute. I began to reflect that this girl, a stranger and helpless, in a strange land, had nothing upon which she could depend but these few links of gold. What wonder, then, if she valued them; if, like all other women, she hid them away and fibbed about them; if she wept over them now they were gone?

Of course it was in my power in a moment to bring them back again; and nothing had seemed easier, a few minutes before, than to hand them back—with a little speech which should cover her with confusion and leave me unmoved. Now, though I wished them round her neck again with all the good will in life, and though to effect my wish I had only to do what I had planned—only to stretch out my hand with that word or two—I sat in my saddle hot and tongue-tied, my fingers sticking to the chain.

Her grief had somehow put a new face on the matter. I could not bear to confess that I had caused it wantonly and for a jest. The right words would not come; while every moment which prolonged the silence between us made the attempt seem more hopeless, the task more difficult; till, like the short-sighted craven I was, I thrust back the chain into my pocket, and, determining to take some secret way of restoring it, put off the crisis.

In some degree I was hurried into this decision by our arrival at the place where we were to rest. This

was an outlying farm belonging to Heritzburg and long used by the family, when journeying to Cassel. Alas! when we came to it, cold, shivering, and hungry, we found it ruined and tenantless, with war's grim brand so deeply stamped upon the face of everything that even the darkness of night failed to hide the scars. I had not expected this, and for a while I forgot the necklace in anxiety for my lady's comfort. I had to get lights and see fires kindled, to order the disposal of the horses, to unpack the food; for we found no scrap, even of fodder for the beasts, in the grimy, smoke-stained barn, which I had known so well stored. Nor was the house in better case. Bed and board were gone, and half the roof. The door lay shattered on the threshold, the window-frames, smashed in wanton fury, covered the floor. The wind moaned through the empty rooms; here and there water stood in puddles. Round the hearth lay broken flasks, and rotting *débris*, and pewter plates bent double—the relics of the ravager's debauch.

We walked about, with lights held above our heads, and looked at all this miserably enough. It was our first glimpse of war, and it silenced even the Waldgrave. As for my mistress, I well remember the look her face wore, when I left her standing with her women, who were already in tears, in the middle of the small chamber assigned to her. I had known her long

enough to be able to read the look, and to be sure that she was wondering whether it would always be so now. Had she exchanged Heritzburg, its peace and comfort, for such nights as these, divided between secret flittings and lodgings fit only for the homeless and wretched?

But neither by word nor sign did she betray her fears, and in the morning she showed a face that vied with the Waldgrave's in cheerfulness. Our horses had had little exercise of late and were in poor condition for travelling. We gave them, therefore, until noon to rest, and a little after that hour got away; one and all, I think—with the exception perhaps of Marie Wort—in better spirits. The sun was high, the weather fine, the country on either side of us woodland, with fine wild prospects. We saw few signs of the ravages which were sure to thrust themselves on the attention wherever man's hand appeared. We could forget for the moment war, and even our own troubles.

We proposed to reach the little village of Erbe by sunset, but darkness overtook us on the road. The track, overgrown and narrowed by spring shoots, was hard to follow in daylight; to attempt to pursue it after nightfall seemed hopeless. We had halted, and the Waldgrave and my lady were considering whether we should camp where we were, or pick our way to a more sheltered spot, when young Jacob, who was leading,

cried out that he saw the glimmer of a camp-fire some way off among the trees. The news threw our party at once into excitement. My lady was for stopping where we were, the Waldgrave for going on. In the end the latter had his way, and it was agreed that we should join the company before us, or at any rate parley with them and learn their intentions. Accordingly we shook up our tired horses and moved cautiously forward.

The distant gleam which had first caught Jacob's eye presently widened into a warm and ruddy glow, in which the polished beech-trunks stood up like the pillars of some great building. Drawing still nearer, we saw that there were two fires built a score of paces apart, in a slight hollow. Round the one a number of men were moving, whose black figures sometimes intervened between us and the blaze. Two or three dogs sprang up and barked at us, and a horse neighed out of the darkness beyond. The other fire seemed at first sight to be deserted; but as the dogs ran towards us, still barking, first one man, then another, rose beside it, and stood looking at us. The arrival of a second party in such a spot was no doubt unexpected enough.

Judging correctly that these two were the leaders of the party, I went forward to announce my lady's rank. One of the men, the shorter and younger, a man of middle height and middle age and dark, stern complexion, came a few paces to meet me.

"Who are you?" he said bluntly, looking keenly beyond me at those who followed.

"The Countess Rotha of Heritzburg, travelling this way to Cassel," I answered; "and with her, her excellency's kinsman, the noble Rupert, Waldgrave of Weimar."

I saw the stranger's face lighten strangely, and he laughed. "Take me to her," he said.

Properly I should have first asked him his name and condition; but he had the air, beyond all things, of a man not to be trifled with, and I turned with him.

My lady had halted with her company a score of paces from the fire. I led him to her bridle.

"This," I said, wondering much who he was, "is her excellency the Countess of Heritzburg."

My lady looked at him. He had uncovered and stood before her, a smile that was almost a laugh in his eyes. "And I," he said, "have the honour to be her excellency's humble and distant cousin, General John Tzerclas, sometimes called, of Tilly."

CHAPTER X.

THE CAMP IN THE FOREST.

As the stranger made this announcement, I chanced to turn my eyes on the Waldgrave's face; and if there was one thing more noteworthy at the moment than the

speaker's air of perfect and assured composure, it was my young lord's look of chagrin. I could imagine that this sudden and unexpected discovery of a kinsman was little to his mind; and the stranger's manner was as little calculated to reconcile him to it. But there was something more than this. I fancy that from the moment he heard Tzerclas' name he scented a rival.

My lady, on the other hand, did not disguise her satisfaction. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance," she exclaimed, looking at the stranger with frank surprise. "Your name, General Tzerclas, has long been known to me. But I was under the impression that you were at present in command of a body of Saxon troops in Bohemia."

"My troops, such as they are, lie a little nearer," he answered, smiling; "so near that they and their leader are equally at your service, Countess."

"For the present I shall be content to claim your hospitality only," my lady answered lightly. "This is my cousin, the Waldgrave Rupert."

"Of Weimar?" the general said, bowing.

"Of Weimar, sir," the young lord answered curtly.

The stranger said no more, but saluting him with a kind of careless punctilio, took hold of my lady's rein and led her horse forward into the firelight.

While he assisted her to dismount I had time to glance round; and the cheerful glow of the fire, which

disclosed arms and accoutrements and camp equipments flung here and there in splendid profusion, did not blind me to other appearances less reassuring. Indeed, that very profusion did something to open my eyes to these appearances, and thereby to the nature of the men amongst whom we had come. The glittering hilts and battered plate, the gaudy cloaks and velvet housings which I saw lying about the roots of the trees, seemed to smack less of a travellers' camp than a robbers' bivouac; while the fierce, swarthy faces which clustered round the farther fire, reminded me of nothing so much as of the swash-buckling escort which had more than once accompanied Count Tilly to Heritzburg. Then, indeed, under the old tiger's paw Tilly's riders had been as lambs. But we were not now at Heritzburg, nor was Count Tilly here. And whether these knaves would be as amenable in the greenwood, whether the Waldgrave had not done us all an ill service when he voted for moving on, were questions I had a difficulty in answering to my satisfaction; the more as, even before we were off our horses, the rude stare the men fixed on my lady raised my choler.

Their leader's bearing, however, left nothing to be desired. He welcomed my mistress to the camp with perfect good breeding, the Waldgrave with civility. He hastened the preparation of supper, and in every way seemed bent on making us comfortable; sending his

knaves to and fro with a hearty good-will, that showed, whoever might stand in awe of them, he did not.

Meanwhile, I had a third fire kindled a score of paces away, where a small thicket held out some promise of privacy, and here I placed our women, bidding three or four of the steadier men remain with them. The injunction was scarcely needed. Our servants were simple fellows born in Heritzburg. They eyed with shyness and awe the swaggering airs and warlike demeanour of Tzerclas' followers, and would not for a year's wages have intruded on their circle without invitation.

The moment I had seen to this I returned to my lady, and then for the first time I had an opportunity of examining our host. He was, I have said, a man of middle height. Sinewy and well-formed, with an upright carriage, he looked from head to foot the model of a soldier of fortune, and moved with a careless grace, which spoke of years of manly exercise. His face was handsome, cold, dark, stern; the nose prominent, the forehead high and narrow. Trimly pointed moustachios and a small pointed beard, both perfectly black, gave him a peculiar and somewhat fierce aspect; and nothing I ever witnessed of his dealings with his troops led me to suppose that this belied the man. He could be, as he was now, courteous, polished, almost genial. I judged that he could be also the reverse. He was

richly, even splendidly, dressed, and seemed to be about forty years of age.

My lady sent me for Fräulein Max, who had been overlooked, and was found cowering beside the newly kindled fire in company with Marie Wort and the women. Though I think she had only herself to thank for her effacement, she was inclined to be offended. But I had no time to waste on words, and disregarding her ill temper I brought her, feebly sniffing, to my lady, who introduced her to her new-found kinsman.

"Pardon me, he said, looking negligently round him. "That reminds me. I, too, have a presentation to make. Where is—oh yes, here is friend Von Werder. I thought, my friend," he continued, addressing the other and older man whom we had seen by his fire, "you had disappeared as mysteriously as you came. Herr von Werder, Countess, was my first chance guest to-night. You are the second."

He spoke in a tone of easy patronage, with his back half turned on the person he mentioned. I looked at the man. He seemed to be over fifty years old, tall, strong, and grey-moustachioed. And that was almost all I could see, for, as if acknowledging an inferiority, and admitting that the terms on which he had been with his host were now altered, he had withdrawn himself a pace or two from the fire. Sitting on the opposite side of it near the outer edge of light and wear-

ing a heavy cloak, he disclosed little of his appearance, even when he rose in acknowledgment of my lady's salute.

"Herr von Werder is not travelling with you, then?" my lady said; chiefly, I think, for the sake of saying something that should include the man.

"No, he is not of my persuasion," the general answered in the same tone of good-natured contempt. "Whither are you bound, my friend?" he continued, glancing over his shoulder and throwing a note of command into his voice. "I did not ask you, and you did not tell me."

"I am going north," the stranger answered in a husky tone. "It may be as far as Magdeburg, general."

"And you come from?"

"Last, sir? Frankfort."

"Well, as you say last, whence before that?"

"The Rhine Bishoprics," the stranger answered reluctantly.

"Ah! Then you have seen something of the war? If you were there before it swept into Bavaria, that is. But a truce to this," he continued. "Here is supper. I beg you not to judge of my hospitality by this night's performance, Countess. I hope to entertain you more fittingly before we part."

But though he made the apology, the supper needed none. Indeed, it was such as made me stare—there

in the forest—and was served in a style and with accompaniments one little expected to find in a soldiers' camp. Silver dishes and chased and curious flagons, flasks of old Rhenish and Burgundy, glass even, from Nuremburg, a dozen things which made my lady's road equipage seem poor and trifling, appeared on the board. And the cooking was equal to the serving. The wine had not gone round long before the Waldgrave lost his air of reserve. He complimented our host, expressed his surprise at the excellence of the entertainment, asked with a laugh how it was done, and, in a word, resumed his usual manner. Perhaps he talked a little too freely, a little too fast. Viewed by the other's side, he grew younger.

What my lady saw or thought as she sat between the two men it was impossible to say. But she seemed in high spirits. She too talked gaily and laughed often; and doubtless the novelty of the scene, the great fires, the dark background, the burnished trunks of the beeches, the bizarre splendour of the feast, the laughter and snatches of song which came from the other fire, were well calculated to excite and amuse her.

"These are not all your troops?" I heard her ask the general.

"Not quite," he answered drily. "My men lie six hours south of us. I hope that you will do me the honour of reviewing them to-morrow."

"You are marching south, then?"

"Yes. Everything and every one goes south this year."

"To join the King of Sweden?"

"Yes," the general answered, holding out his silver cup to be filled, and for that reason perhaps speaking very deliberately, "to join the King of Sweden—at Nuremburg. But you have not yet told me, countess," he continued, "why you are afield. This part is not in a very settled state, and I should have thought that the present time was——"

"A bad one for travelling?" my lady answered. "Yes. But, I regret to say, Heritzburg is not in a very settled state either." And thereon, without dwelling much on the cause of her troubles, she told him the main facts which had led to her departure.

I saw his lip curl and his eyes flicker with scorn. "But had you no gunpowder?" he said, turning to the Waldgrave.

"We had a little, but no cannon," he answered confidently.

"What of that?" the general retorted icily. "I would have made a bomb, no matter of what, and fired it out of a leather boot hooped with cask-irons! I would have had half a dozen of their houses burning about their ears before they knew where they were, the insolents!"

The Waldgrave looked ashamed of himself. "I did not think of that," he said; and he hastened to hide his confusion in his glass.

"Well, it is not too late," General Tzerclas rejoined, showing his teeth. "If the Countess pleases, we will soon teach her subjects a lesson. I am not pushed for time. I will detach four troops of horse and return with you to-morrow, and settle the matter in a trice."

But my lady said that she would not have that, and persisted so firmly in her refusal that though he pressed the offer upon her, and I could see was keenly interested in its acceptance, he had to give way. The reasons she put forward were the loss of his time and the injury to his cause; the real one consisted, I knew, in her merciful reluctance to give over the town to his troops, a reluctance for which I honoured her. To appease him, however, for he seemed inclined to take her refusal in bad part, she consented to go out of her way to visit his camp next day.

At this point my lady sent me on an errand to her women, which caused me to be away some minutes. When I came back I found that a change had taken place. The Waldgrave was speaking, and, from his heated face and the tone of his voice, it was evident that the old wine which had begun by opening his heart had ended by rousing his pugnacity.

"Pooh! I protest *in toto!*" I heard him say as I

came up. "I deny it altogether. You will tell me next that the Germans are worse soldiers than the Swedes!"

"Pardon me, I did not say so," General Tzerclas answered. The wine had taken no effect on him, or perhaps he had drunk less. He was as suave and cold as ever.

"But you meant it!" the younger man retorted.

"No, I did not mean it," the general answered, still unmoved. "What I said was that Germany had produced so far no great commander in this war, which has now lasted thirteen years."

"Prince Bernard of Weimar, my kinsman!" the Waldgrave said.

"Pardon me," Tzerclas replied politely. "Pardon me again if I say that I do not think he has earned that title. He is a soldier of merit. No more."

"Wallenstein, then?"

"You forget. He is a Bohemian."

"Count Tilly, then?" the Waldgrave cried hotly.

"A Walloon," the general answered with a shrug. "The King of Sweden? A Swede, of course."

"A German by the mother's side," my lady interposed with a smile.

"As you, Countess, are a Walloon," Tzerclas answered with another low bow. "Yet I do not doubt that you count yourself a German?"

"Yes," she said, blushing. "I am proud to do so."

What courteous answer he would have made to this I do not know. She had scarcely spoken before a deep voice on the farther side of the fire was heard, asking "What of Count Pappenheim?"

The speaker was Von Werder, who had long sat so modestly silent that I had forgotten his presence. He seemed scarcely to belong to the party; though Fräulein Max, who sat on the Waldgrave's left hand, formed a sort of link stretched out towards him. Tzerclas had forgotten him too, I think, for he started at the sound of his voice and gave him but a curt answer.

"He is no commander," he said sharply. "A great leader of horse he is, great at fighting, great at burning, great set at plundering. No more."

"I see. You allow no merit in a German!" the Waldgrave cried with an ugly sneer. He had drunk too much.

But Tzerclas was not to be moved. There was something fine in the toleration he extended to the younger man. "Not at all," he said quietly. "Yet I am of opinion that, even apart from arms, Germany has shown since the beginning of this war few men of merit."

"The Duke of Bavaria," the same deep voice beyond the fire suggested.

"Maximilian?" Tzerclas answered. This time he did

not seem to resent the stranger's interference. "Yes, he is something of a statesman. You are right, my friend. He and Leuchtenstein, the Landgrave's minister—he too is a man. I will give you those two. But even they play second parts. The fate of Germany lies in no German hands. It lies in the hands of Gustavus Adolphus and Oxenstierna, Swedes; of Wallenstein, a Bohemian; of—I know not who will be the next foreigner."

"That is all very well; but you are a foreigner yourself," the Waldgrave cried.

"Yes, I am a Walloon," Tzerclas said, still quietly, though this time I saw his eyes flicker. "It is true; why should I deny it? You represent the native, and I the foreign element. The Countess stands between us, representing both."

The Waldgrave rose with an oath and a flushed face, and for a moment I thought that we were going to have trouble. But he remembered himself in time, and sitting down again in silence, gazed sulkily at the fire.

The movement, however, was enough for my lady. She rose to her feet to break up the party; and turning her shoulder to the offender, began to thank General Tzerclas for his entertainment. This made the Waldgrave, who was compelled to stand by, listening, look more sulky than ever; but she continued to take no

notice of him, and though he remained awkwardly regarding her and waiting for a word, as long as she stood, she went away without once turning her eyes on him. The general snatched a torch from me and lighted her with his own hand to our part of the camp, where he took a respectful leave of her; adding, as he withdrew, that he would march at any hour in the morning that might suit her, and that in all things she might command his servants and himself.

He had sent over for her use a small tent, provided originally, no doubt, for his own sleeping quarters. And we found that in a hundred other ways he had shown himself thoughtful for her comfort. She stood a moment looking about her with satisfaction; and when she turned to dismiss me, there was, or I was mistaken, a gleam of amusement in her eye. After all, she was a woman.

CHAPTER XI.

STOLEN!

THE night was still young, and when I had seen my mistress and her women comfortably settled, I sauntered back towards the middle of the camp. The three fires stood here, and there, and there, among the trees, like the feet of a three-legged stool; so that between them lay a middle space which partook of the light of all,

and yet remained shadowy and ill-defined. A single beech which stood in this space, and served in some degree to screen our fire from observation, added to the darkness of the borderland. At times the flames blazed up, disclosing trunk and branches; again they waned, and only a shadowy mass filled the middle space.

I went and stood under this tree and looked about me. The Waldgrave had disappeared, probably to his couch. So had Von Werder. Only General Tzerclas remained beside the fire at which we had supped, and he no longer sat erect. Covered with a great cloak he lay at his ease on a pile of furs, reading by the light of the fire in a small fat book, which even at that distance I could see was thumbed and dog's-eared. Such an employment in such a man—in huge contrast with the noisy brawling and laughter of his following—struck me as remarkable. I felt a great curiosity to know what he was studying, and in particular whether it was the Bible. But the distance between us was too great and the light too uncertain; and after straining my eyes awhile I gave up the attempt, consoling myself with the thought that had I been nearer I had perhaps been no wiser.

I was about to withdraw, tolerably satisfied, to seek my own rest, when a stick snapped sharply behind me. Unwilling to be caught spying, I turned quickly and

found myself face to face with a tall figure, which had come up noiselessly behind me. The unknown was so close to me, I recoiled in alarm; but the next moment he lowered his cloak from his face, and I saw that it was Von Werder.

"Hush, man!" he said, raising his hand to enforce caution. "A word with you. Come this way."

He gave me no time to demur or ask questions, but taking obedience for granted, turned and led the way down a narrow path, proceeding steadily onwards until the glare of the fire sank into a distant gleam behind us. Then he stopped suddenly and faced me, but the darkness in which we stood among the tree-trunks still prevented me seeing his features, and gave to the whole interview an air of mystery.

"You are the Countess of Heritzburg's steward?" he said abruptly.

"I am," I answered, wondering at the change in his tone, which, deep before, had become on a sudden imperative. By the fire and in Tzerclas' company he had spoken with a kind of diffidence, an air of acknowledged inferiority. Not a trace of that remained.

"The Waldgrave Rupert," he continued—"he is a new acquaintance?"

"He is not an old friend," I replied. I could not think what he would be at with his questions. All my instincts were on the side of refusing to answer them.

But his manner imposed upon me, though his figure and face were hidden; and though I wondered, I answered.

"He is young," he said, as if to himself.

"Yes, he is young," I answered dryly. "He will grow older."

He remained silent a moment, apparently in thought. Then he spoke suddenly and bluntly. "You are an honest man, I believe," he said. "I watched you at supper, and I think I can trust you. I will be plain with you. Your mistress had better have stayed at Heritzburg, steward."

"It is possible," I said. I was more than half inclined to think so myself.

"She has come abroad, however. That being so, the sooner she is in Cassel, the better."

"We are going thither," I answered curtly.

"You were!" he replied; and the meaning in his voice gave me a start. "You were, I say?" he continued strenuously. "Whither you are going now will depend, unless you exert yourself and are careful, on General John Tzerclas of the Saxon service. You visit his camp to-morrow. Take a hint. Get your mistress out of it and inside the walls of Cassel as soon as you can."

"Why?" I said stubbornly. "Why?" For it seemed to me that I was being asked all and told nothing.

The man's vague warnings chimed in with my own fears, and yet I resented them coming from a stranger. I tried to pierce the darkness, to read his face, to solve the mystery of his altered tone. But the night baffled me; I could see nothing save a tall, dark form, and I fell back upon words and obstruction. "Why?" I asked jealously. "He is my lady's cousin."

"After a fashion," the stranger rejoined coldly and slowly, and not at all as if he meant to argue with me. "I should be better content, man, if he were her uncle. However, I have said enough. Do you bear it in mind, and as you are faithful, be wary. So much for that. And now," he continued, in a different tone, a tone in which a note of anxiety lurked whether he would or no, "I have a question to ask on my own account, friend. Have you heard at any time within the last twelve months of a lost child being picked up to the north of this, in Heritzburg or the neighbourhood?"

"A lost child?" I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes!" he retorted impatiently. And I felt, though I could not see, that he was peering at me as I had lately peered at him. "Isn't that plain German? A lost child, man? There is nothing hard to understand in it. Such a thing has been heard of before — and found, I suppose. A little boy, two years old."

"No," I said, "I have heard nothing of one. A

child two years old? Why, it could not go alone; it could not walk!"

In the darkness, which is a wonderful sharpener of ears, I heard the man move hastily. "No," he said with a stern note in his voice, "I suppose not; I suppose it could not. At any rate, you have not heard of it?"

"No," I said, "certainly not."

"If it had been found Heritzburg way," he continued jealously, "you would have, I suppose?"

"I should have—if any one," I answered.

"Thank you," he said curtly. "That is all now. Good night."

And suddenly, with that only, and no warning or further farewell, he turned and strode off. I heard him go plunging through the last year's leaves, and the noise told me he trod them sternly and heavily, with the foot of a man disappointed and not for the first time.

"It must be his child," I muttered, looking after him.

I waited until the last sound of his retreat died away, and then I made my own way back to the camp. As chance would have it, I hit it close to the servants' fire, and before I could turn was espied by some of those who sat at it. One, a stout, swarthy fellow, with bright black eyes, and a small feather in his cap, sprang up and came towards me.

"Why so shy, comrade?" he cried, with a hiccough

in his voice. "Himmel! There are a pair of us!" And he raised his hand and laid it on my head—with an effort, for I am six feet and two inches. "Peace!" and he touched me on the breast. "War!" and he touched himself. "And a good broad piece you are, and a big piece, and a heavy piece, I'll warrant!" he continued.

"I might say the same for you!" I retorted, suffering him to lead me to the fire.

"Oh, I?" he cried with a drunken swagger. "I am a double gold ducat, true metal, stamped with the Emperor's man-at-arms! Melted in the Low Countries under Spinola—that is, these thirteen years back—minted by Wallenstein, tried by the noble general!

"Clink! Clink! Clink!

Sword and stirrup and spur.

Ride! Ride! Ride!

Fast as feather or fur!

That is my sort! But come, welcome! Will you drink? Will you play? Will you 'list? Come, the night is young.

'For the night-sky is red,
And the burgher's abed,
And bold Pappenheim's raiding the lea!'

Which shall it be, friend?"

"I will drink with you or play with you, captain," I answered, seeing nothing else for it, "so far as a poor man may; but as for enlisting, I am satisfied with my present service."

"Ha! ha! I can quite understand that!" he answered, winking tipsily. "Woman, lovely woman! Here's to her! Here's to her! Here's to her, lads of the free company!"

'Drink, lads, drink!

Firkin and flagon and flask.

Hands, lads, hands!

A round to the maid in the mask!'

Why, man, you look like a death's head! You are too sober! Shame on you, and you a German!"

"An Italian were as good a toper!" one of the men beside him growled.

"Or a whey-fed Switzer!" another cried.

"Perhaps you are better with the dice!" the captain, intendant, or what he was, continued. "You will throw a main? Come, for the honour of your mistress?"

I had nearly a score of ducats of my own in my pouch, and so far I could pay if I lost. I thought that I might get some clue to Tzerclas' nature and plans by humouring the man, and I assented.

"The dice, lads, the dice!" he cried. Ludwig, the others called him.

'Ho, the roof shall be red

O'er the heretic's head,

For bold Pappenheim's raiding the lea!'

The dice, the dice!"

"Your guest looks scared," one said, looking at me grimly. "Perhaps he is a heretic!"

"Chut! we are all heretics for the present!" Ludwig answered recklessly. "A fig for a credo and a fig for a psalm! Give me a good horse and a good sword and fat farmhouses. I ask no more. Shall it be a short life and a merry one? The highest to have it?"

"Content," I said, trying to fall into his humour.

"A ducat a throw?" he asked, posing the caster. A man, as he spoke, placed a saddle between us, while half a dozen others pressed round to watch us. The flame leaping up shone on their dark, lean faces and gleaming eyes, or picked out here and there the haft of a knife or the butt of a pistol. Some wore steel caps, some caps of fur, some gaudy handkerchiefs twisted round their heads. There were Spaniards, Bohemians, Walloons among them; a Croat or two; a few Saxons. "Come," cried the captain, rattling the dice-box. "A ducat a throw, Master Peace? Between gentlemen?"

"Content," I said, though my heart beat fast. I had never even seen men play so high.

"So!" growled a German who crouched beside me—a one-eyed man, fat and fair, the one fair-faced man in the company; "'tis a cock of a fine hackle!"

"See me strip him!" Captain Ludwig rejoined gleefully. And he threw and I threw, and I won; while the flame, leaping and sinking, flung its ruddy light on the walls of our huge, leafy chamber. Then he won. Then I won. I won again, again, again!

"He has the fiend's own luck!" a Pole cried with a curse.

"Steady, Ludwig!" quoth another. "Will you be beaten by a clod-pate?"

"Fill his cup!" my opponent cried hardily. "He has the knack of it! But I will strip him! Beat up the fire there! I can't see the spots. That is nine ducats you have won, good broad-piece! Throw away!"

I threw, and at it we went again, but now luck began to run against me, though slowly. The hollow rattle of the dice, the voices calling the numbers, the oath and the cry of triumph went on monotonously: went on—and I think the spirit of play had fairly got hold of me—when a stern voice suddenly broke in on our game.

"Put up, there, you rascals!" Tzerclas cried from his fire. "Have done, do you hear, or it will be the worse for you! Kennel, I say!"

Captain Ludwig swore under his breath. "Ugh!" he muttered, "just as I was getting my hand in! What is the score! Seven ducats to me; and little enough for the trouble. Hand over, comrade. You know the proverb."

In haste to be gone after the warning we had received, I plunged my hand into my pouch, and drew out in a hurry, not a fistful of ducats as I intended, but a score of links of gold chain, which for a moment

glittered in the firelight. As quickly as I could I thrust the chain—it was Marie Wort's, of course—back into my pocket, but not before the German sitting beside me had seen it. I looked at him guiltily while I fumbled for the money, and he tried to look as if he had seen nothing. But his one eye sparkled evilly, and I saw his lips tremble with greed. He said nothing, however, and in a moment I found the money and paid my debt.

Most of the men had already laid themselves down and were snoring, with their feet to the fire. I muttered good night, and seizing my cap went off. To gain my quarters, I had to walk across the open under the beech-tree. I had just reached this tree, and was passing through the shadow under the branches, when the sound of a light footstep at my heels startled me. Turning in my tracks I surprised the one-eyed German.

“Well,” I said wrathfully—I was not in the best of tempers at losing—“what do you want?”

The action and the challenge took him aback. “Want?” he grumbled, recoiling a step. “Nothing. Is this your private property?”

He had *thief* written all over his fat, pale face, and I knew very well what private property he wanted. If I ever saw a sneaking, hang-dog visage it was his! The more I looked at him the more I loathed him.

“Go!” I said; “get home, you cur! or I will break every bone in your body.”

He glared at me with a curse in his one eye, but he saw that I was too big for him. Besides, General Tzerclas lay reading by his fire thirty paces away. Baffled and furious, the rascal slunk off with a muttered word, and went back the way he had come.

I found Franz on guard, and after seeing to the fire and hearing that all was well, I lay down beside him in my cloak. But I found it less easy to sleep. The fire-light, playing among the leaves and branches overhead, formed likenesses of the men I had left, now grotesque masks, and now scowling faces, fierce-eyed and grim. Von Werder’s warning recurred to me with added weight and would not leave me at peace. I wondered what he meant; I wondered what he suspected, still more, what he knew.

And yet had I need to wonder, or do more than look round and use my wits? What was our position? How were we situate? In the camp and in the hands of a soldier of fortune; a man cold and polite, but probably cruel and possibly brutal, lacking enthusiasm, lacking, or I was mistaken, religion, without any checks save such as his ambition or fears imposed upon him. And for his power, I saw him surrounded by desperadoes, soldiers in name, banditti in fact, savage, reckless, and unscrupulous; the men, or the twin-

brothers of the men, who under another banner had sacked Magdeburg and ravaged Halle.

What was to prevent such a man making his advantage out of us? What was to prevent his marching back to Heritzburg and seizing town and castle under cover of my lady's name, or detaining us as long as he saw fit, or as suited his purpose? The Landgrave and his Minister were far away, plunged in the turmoil of a great war. The Emperor's authority was at an end. The Saxon circle to which we belonged was disorganized. All law, all order, all administration outside the walls of the cities were in abeyance. In his own camp and as far beyond it as his sword could reach the soldier of fortune was lord, absolute and uncontrolled.

This trouble kept me turning and tossing for a good hour. At one moment, I made up my mind to rouse my lady before it was light and be gone with the dawn, if I could persuade her; at another, I judged it better to wait until the camp was struck and the horses were saddled, and then to bid Tzerclas, while our numbers were something like equal, go his way and let us go ours—to Frankfort or Cassel, or wherever strong walls and honest citizens, with wives and daughters of their own, held out a prospect of safety.

The mind once roused to activity works, whether a man will or no. When I had thought that matter

threadbare, I fell, in my own despite and to my great torment, on another; the gold necklace. Through the day, and pending some opportunity of restoring the chain by stealth, I had shunned its owner. Her dejection, her silence, the way in which she drooped in the saddle, all had reproached me. To avoid that reproach, still more to avoid the meekness of her eyes, I had ridden at a distance from her, sometimes at the head of our company, sometimes at the tail, but never where she rode. And all day I had had a dozen things to consider.

Yet, in spite of this care and preoccupation, I had not succeeded in keeping her out of my mind. At fords and broken bits of the road, or at steep places where the track wound above the Werra, the thought, "How will she cross this?" had occurred to me, so that I had found it hard to hold off from her at such places. And, then, there was the gold necklace. It burned in my pocket. It made me feel, whenever my hand lit on it, like a thief, and as mean as the meanest. For a time, it is true, after our meeting with Tzerclas, I had managed to forget it; but now, in the watches of the night, I was consumed with longing to be rid of the thing, to see it back in her possession, to close the matter before some inconceivable trick of spiteful fortune put it out of my power to do so. For, what if an accident happened to me and the chain were found in

my pocket? What would she think of me then? Or if the last accident of all befel me, and she never got her own?

These imaginations, working in a mind already fevered, spurred me so painfully that I felt I could hardly wait till morning. Two or three times in the night I rose on my elbow and looked round the sleeping camp, and wished that I could return the chain to her then and there.

I could not. And at last, not long before day-break, I fell asleep. But even then the chain did not leave me at peace. It haunted my dreams. It slid through my fingers and fell away into unfathomable depths. Or a man with his face hidden dangled it before my eyes, and went away, away, away, while I stood unable to move hand or foot. Or I was digging in a pit for it, digging with nails and bleeding fingers, believing it to be another inch, always another inch below, yet never able to reach it however hard I worked.

I awoke at last, bathed in perspiration and unrefreshed, to find the sun an hour up and the camp beginning to stir itself. Here and there a man was renewing the fires, while his fellows sat up yawning, or, crouching chin and knees together, looked on drowsily. The chill morning air, the curling smoke, the song of the lark as it soared into the blue heaven, the snort and neigh of the tethered horses, the sounds of waking

life and reality seemed to bless me. I thanked Heaven it was a dream.

Young Jacob was tending our fire, and I sat awhile, watching him sleepily. "It will be a fine day," I said at last, preparing to get to my feet.

"For certain," he answered. Then he looked at me shyly. "You were in the wars, last night, Master Martin?" he said.

"In the wars?" I exclaimed. "What do you mean?" And I stared at him; waiting, with one knee and one foot on the ground for his answer.

He pointed to my cloak. I looked down, and saw to my surprise a great slit in it—a clean cut in the stuff, a foot long. For a moment I looked at the slit, wondering stupidly and trying to remember how it could have been done. Then a sudden flash of intelligence entered my mind, and with a dreadful pang of terror, I thrust my hand into my pouch. The chain was gone!

I sprang to my feet. I tore off the pouch and peered into it. I shook my clothes like one possessed. I stooped and searched the ground where I had lain. But all fruitlessly. The chain was gone!

As soon as I knew this for certain, I turned on Jacob, and seizing him by the throat, shook him to and fro. "Wretch!" I said. "You have slept! You have slept and let us be robbed! You have ruined me!"

He gurgled out a startled denial, and the others

came round us and got him from me. But my outcry had roused all our part of the camp, and my lady put her head out of the tent and asked what was the matter. Some one told her.

"That is bad," she said kindly. "What is it you have lost, Martin?"

Over her shoulder I saw a pale face peer out—Marie Wort's; and on the instant I felt my rage die down into a miserable chill, the chill of despair.

"Seven ducats," I said sullenly, looking down at the ground, for the truth, at sight of her, crushed me. I was a thief! This had made me one. Who was I to cry out that I was robbed?

"It must be one of the strangers," my lady said in a low voice and with an air of disturbance. "Do you——"

I sprang away without waiting to hear more—they must have thought me mad. I tore to the spot where I had dined the night before. Three or four men sat round the fire, swearing and grumbling, as is the manner of their kind in the morning. But the man I wanted was not among them.

"Where is Ludwig?" I panted. "Where is he?"

A form, wrapped head and all in a cloak, struggled for a moment with its coverings, and freeing itself at last, rose to a sitting posture. It was Captain Ludwig.

"Who wants me?" he muttered sleepily.

"I!" I cried, stooping and seizing him by the shoulder. I was trembling with excitement. "I have been robbed! Do you hear, man? I have been robbed! In the night!"

He shook me off impatiently. "Well, what is that to me?" he grunted. And he turned to warm himself.

"Where is the Saxon who sat by me last night?" I demanded, almost beside myself with fury.

"How do I know?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders peevishly. "Robbed? Well, you are not the first person that has been robbed. You need not make such an outcry about it. There is more than one thief about, eh, Taddeo?" And he winked cunningly at his comrades.

The man's indifference maddened me. I could scarcely keep my hands off him. Fortunately, Taddeo's answer put an end to my doubts.

"There is one less, at any rate, captain," he said carelessly, stooping forward to stir the embers. "The Saxon is gone."

"Himmel! He has, has he? Without leave?" Ludwig answered. "The worse for him if we catch him, that is all!"

"He went off with the German and his servants an hour before sunrise," Taddeo said with a yawn.

"He had better not let our noble general overtake him!" Ludwig answered grimly, while I stood still,

stricken dumb by the news. "But enough of that. Where is my cap?"

Taddeo pushed it towards him with his foot, and he took it up and put it on. He had no sooner done so than a thought seemed to strike him. He snatched the cap off again, and, plunging his hand into it, groped in the lining. The next instant he sprang to his feet with a howl of rage.

Taddeo looked at him in astonishment. "What is it?" he asked.

For answer, Ludwig ran at him and dealt him a tremendous kick. "There, pig, that is for you!" he cried vengefully, his eyes almost starting from his head. "You will not ask what it is next time! That Saxon hound has robbed me—that is what it is. But he shall pay for it. He shall hang before night! Every ducat I had he has taken, pig, dog, vermin that he is! But I'll be even with him. I'll lash——"

And Master Ludwig, all his indifference cast to the winds, continued to stamp and scream so loudly that in the end Tzerclas overheard him, and appeared.

"What is this?" the general said harshly. "Is that man mad?"

Ludwig grew a little calmer at sight of him. "The Saxon, Heller," he answered, scowling. "He has deserted with fifty ducats of mine, general; good honest money!"

"The worse for you," Tzerclas answered cynically. "And the worse for him, if I catch him. He will hang."

"He has taken a gold chain of mine also," I said, thrusting myself forward.

The general looked hard at me. "Umph! Which way has he gone?" he asked.

"He left with the German gentleman and his two servants at daybreak," Taddeo answered, rubbing himself. "I thought that he had orders to go with them."

"He has gone north, then?"

"North they started," Taddeo whimpered.

The general turned to Ludwig. "Take two men," he said curtly, "and follow him. But, whether you catch him or not, see that you are back two hours before noon. And let me have no more noise."

Ludwig saluted hastily, and, it will be believed, lost no time in obeying his orders. In two minutes he was in the saddle, and dashed out of camp, followed by two of his men and one of my lady's, whom I took leave to add to the party for the better care of my property, should it be recovered. I looked after them with longing eyes, and listened to the last beat of the hoofs as they passed through the forest. And then for three hours I had to wait in a dreadful state of suspense and inaction. At the end of that time the party rode in again, the horses bloody with spurring, the riders

gloomy and chapfallen. They had galloped four leagues without coming on the slightest trace of the fugitive or his companions.

"The German never went north," Ludwig said, looking darkly at his chief.

Tzerclas smoothed his chin with his thumb and forefinger. "Are you sure of that?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Quite, general. They have all gone south together," Ludwig answered, "and are far enough away by this time."

"Umph! Well, we start in an hour."

And that was all! I wandered away and stood staring at the ground. I remembered that Peter the locksmith had valued the chain at two hundred ducats, a sum exceeding any I could pay. But that was not all, or the worst. What was I to say to the girl? How was I to explain a piece of folly, mischief, call it what you will, that had turned out so badly? If I told her the truth, would she believe me?

At that thought I started. Why tell her the truth at all? Why not leave her in ignorance? She would be none the worse, for the chain was gone. And I, who had never meant to steal it, should be the better, seeing that I should escape the humiliation of confessing what I had done. Confession could do no good to her. And in what a position it would place me!

Leaning against a tree and driving my heel moodily into the soil, I was still battling with this temptation—for a temptation I knew it was, even then—when a light touch fell on my sleeve. I turned, and there was the girl herself, waiting to speak to me!

CHAPTER XII.

NEAR THE EDGE.

“WILL you give me back my—my chain, if you please?” she asked timidly.

She stood before me with clasped hands and blushing cheeks, as if she were the culprit. Her eyes looked anywhere to avoid mine. Her voice trembled, and she seemed ready to sink into the earth with shame. She was small, weak, helpless. But her words! Had they come from the judge sitting on his bench, with axe and branding-iron by his side, they could not have cowed me more completely, or deprived me more quickly of wit and courage.

“Your chain?” I stammered, stricken almost voiceless. “What do you mean?”

“If you please,” she whispered, her face flushing more and more, her eyes filling. “My chain.”

“But how—what makes you think that I have got it?” I muttered hoarsely. “What makes you come to me?”

To confess, of my own motive and unsuspected, had been bad enough and shameful enough; but to be accused, unmasked, convicted—and by her! This was too much. My face burned, my eyes were hot as fire.

She twisted the fingers of one hand tightly round the other, but she did not look up. “You took it from the child’s neck as we passed through the ford,” she said in a low voice, “that night I lost it.”

“I did?” I exclaimed. “I did, girl?”

She nodded firmly, her lip trembling. But she never looked up! She never looked in my face!

Yet her insistence angered me. How did she know? How could she know? I put the question into words. “How do you know?” I said harshly. “Who told you so? Who told you this—this lie, woman?”

“The child,” she answered, shivering under my words.

I opened my mouth and drew in my breath with a loud gasp. I had never thought of that. I had never thought, save once for a brief moment, of the child talking, and, on the instant, I stood speechless; convicted and confounded! Then I found my voice again.

“The child told you!” I muttered incredulously. “The child? Why, it cannot talk!”

“It can,” she said, her voice breaking. “It can talk to me, and I can understand it. Oh, I am so sorry!” And with that she broke down. She turned

away and, covering her face with her hands, began to sob bitterly. Her shoulders heaved, and all her slender frame shook with the storm.

A thief, and a liar! That was what I had made myself. I stood glaring at her, my breast full of sullen passion. I hated her and her necklace. Would that it had been buried a thousand fathoms deep in the sea! That moment in the ford, one moment only, one moment of folly, had wrecked me. I raged against her and against myself. I could have struck her. If she had only left me alone, if she had not come to question me and accuse me, I should not have lied; and then, perhaps, I might have recovered the necklace, somehow and some day, and, giving it back to her, told her the story and kept my honesty. Now I had lied, and she knew it. And I hated her. I hated her, sobbing and shaking and shivering before me.

As we stood so, a ray of sunlight, passing through the branches, fell on her bowed head. A hundred paces away, little more, they were striking the camp. The men's voices, their harsh jests and rude laughter, reached us. I heard one man called, and another, and orders given, and the jingle of the bits and bridles. All was unchanged, everything was proceeding in its usual course. One thing only was altered in the world—Martin Schwartz, the steward.

I found no words to lie to her farther, to deny or

protest. And when we had stood thus for a short time, she began to move slowly away from me, though the passion of her tears seemed to increase rather than slacken as she went, and shook her frame with such vehemence that she could scarcely walk.

For a time I stood looking after her in sullen shame, doing and saying nothing to stay her. Then suddenly a change came over me. She looked so friendless, so frail, and gentle and helpless, that, in the middle of my own selfish shame, my heart smote me. I felt a sudden welling up of pity and repentance, which worked so quickly and wonderfully in me, that before she had gone a score of paces from me, my hand was on her shoulder.

“Stop! Stay a moment!” I muttered hoarsely. “I have been lying to you. I took the necklace—from the child’s neck. It is all true.”

She ceased crying on the instant, but she did not turn or look at me. She seemed to be struggling for composure, and presently, with her face still averted, she murmured—

“Why did you take it? Will you please to tell me?”

As well as I could, I did tell her; how and why I had taken it, what I had done with it, and how I had lost it. She listened, but she made no sign, she said nothing; and her silence hurt me at last so keenly that I added with bitterness—

"I lied before, and you need not believe what I say now. Still, it is true."

She turned her face quickly to me, and I saw that her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining. "I believe it—every word," she said.

"I will not lie to you again," I muttered, half in pride.

"You never did," she answered. And she stole a glance at me, a faint smile flickering about her lips. "Your face never did, Master Martin."

"Yet you wept sore enough for your chain," I exclaimed.

She looked at me for a moment with something like anger in her gentle eyes, so that for a brief instant she seemed transformed. And she drew away from me.

"Did you think that I wept for that?" she said in a tone of offence. "I did not."

"Then for what?" I asked clumsily.

She looked two or three ways before she answered, and in the distance some one called me.

"There! you are wanted," she said hurriedly.

"But you have not answered my question," I said.

She took a step away and paused, with her head half turned. "I wept—I wept because I thought that I had lost a friend," she said in a low voice. "And I have few, Master Martin."

She was gone, before I could answer, through the

trees and back to the camp. And I had to follow. Half a dozen voices in half a dozen places were calling my name. The general's trumpet was sounding. I slipped aside and joined the camp from another quarter, and in a moment was in the middle of the hubbub, beset by restive horses and swaying poles, clanging kettles and swearing riders, and all the hurry and confusion of the start. My lady called to me sharply to know where I had been, and why I was late. The Waldgrave wanted this, Fraulein Max that. The general frowned at me from afar. It would have been no great wonder if I had lost my temper.

But I did not; I was in no risk of doing so. I had gone near the edge and been plucked back. Late, and when all seemed over, I had been given a place for repentance; and gratitude and relief so filled my breast that I had a smile for every one. The sun seemed to shine more brightly, the wind to blow more softly—the wind which blew from Marie Wort to me. Thank God!

As I fell in behind my lady—the general riding alone some way in the rear—the Waldgrave came up and took his place at her side; greeting her with an awkward air which seemed to prove that this was his first appearance in her neighbourhood. He made a show of hiding his uneasiness under a face of careless gaiety, such as was his natural wear; and for awhile he rattled on gallantly. But my lady's cool tone and short

answers soon stripped him, and left him with no other resource but to take offence. He took it, and for a mile or so rode on in gloomy silence, brooding over his wrongs. Then, anger giving way to self-reproach, he grew tired of this.

With a sudden gesture he leaned over and laid his hand on the withers of my lady's horse. "Tell me, what is the matter, fair cousin?" he said in a softened tone. "What have I done?"

"You should know," she answered, giving him one keen glance, but speaking more gently than before.

"I know?" he replied hardily. "I am sure I don't."

My lady shook her head. "I think you do," she said.

"I suppose you are angry with me for—for standing up for Germany last night?" he muttered, withdrawing his hand and speaking coldly in his turn.

"No, not for that," my lady rejoined firmly. "Certainly not for that. But for being too German in one of your habits, Rupert. Which do you think made the better figure last night—you who were flushed with wine, or General Tzerclas who kept his head cool? You who bragged like a boy, or General Tzerclas who said less than he meant? You who were rude to your host; or he who made every allowance for his guest?"

"Allowance!" the young lord cried, firing up at the word. And I could see that he reddened to the nape of his neck with anger. "There was no need!"

"Yes, allowance," my lady answered firmly. "There was every need."

"You would have me drink nothing, I suppose?" he exclaimed, fretting and fuming.

"I would rather you drank nothing than too much," she replied. "Because a German and a drunkard have come to mean the same thing, is that a reason for deepening the reproach? For shame, Rupert!"

"You treat me like a boy!" he cried bitterly. And I thought that she was hard on him.

"Well, you have only yourself to thank," she retorted cruelly, "if I do. You behave like a boy. And I do not like to have to blush for my friends."

That cut him very deeply. He uttered a half-stifled cry of anger and reined in his horse. "You have said enough," he said, speaking thickly. "You shall have no farther cause to blush in my case. I will relieve you." And on the instant, with a low bow, he turned his horse's head and rode down the column towards the rear, leaving my lady to go on alone.

I confess I thought that she had been hard on him. Perhaps she thought so too, now he was gone. And here were the beginnings of a pretty quarrel. But I did not guess the direction it was likely to take, until a horseman spurred quickly by me, and in a moment General Tzerclas, his velvet cloak hanging at his shoulder, had taken the Waldgrave's place, and with his head

bent low over his horse's neck was talking earnestly to my lady. I saw him indicate this and that quarter with his gauntleted hand. I could fancy that this was Cassel, and that Frankfort, and another his camp, and that he was proposing plans and routes. But what he said I could not hear. He had a low, quiet way of talking, very characteristic of him, which flattered those to whom he addressed himself and baffled others.

And this, I suppose, it was that made me suspicious. For the longer I rode behind him and the more I considered him, the less I liked both him and the prospect. He was in the prime of his age and strength, inferior to the Waldgrave in height and the air of youth, but superior in that which the other lacked—the bearing of a man of the world, tried by good and evil fortune, and versed in many perils. Cool and resolute, handsome in a hard-bitten fashion, gifted, as I believed, with infinite address, he possessed much to take the fancy of a woman; particularly of such a one as my lady, long used to comfort, and now taught by sudden ill-fortune the value of a strong arm.

The possibility of such an alliance, thus suddenly thrust upon me, chilled me. Anything, I said, rather than that. The Waldgrave had not left his post five minutes before I began to think of him with longing, before I began to invest him with all manner of virtues. At least, he was a German, of a great and noble family,

tied to the soil, and fettered in his dealings by a hundred traditions; while this man riding before me possessed not one of these qualities!

Von Werder's warning, which the loss of Marie Wort's necklace had driven from my mind for a time, recurred with double force, and did not tend to reassure me. I listened with all my might, trying to learn whether my lady was pledging herself to any course, for I knew that if she once promised I should find it hard to move her. But I could not catch a syllable, and presently there came an interruption which diverted my thoughts.

One of the two men who rode in front, and served for the advanced guard of our party, came galloping back with his hand raised and a grin on his dark face. He pulled up his horse a few paces short of General Tzerclas and my lady, and reported that he had found the Saxon.

"What! Heller?" the general exclaimed. "Here, Ludwig! Where are you?"

Ludwig, and I, and two or three more, spurred forward, and passing by my lady, who reined in her horse, came a hundred paces farther on upon the other trooper. He had dismounted and was stooping over a man's body, which lay under a great tree that stood a few yards off the track.

"So, so? He is dead, is he?" the captain cried, leaping from his saddle.

"Ay, this hour or more," the trooper answered with a grunt. "And robbed!"

"Robbed?" Ludwig shrieked. "Then you have done it, you scoundrel."

"Not I!" the fellow said coolly. "Whoever it was killed him, robbed him. You can see for yourself that he has been dead an hour or more."

The sudden hope which had dawned in my breast sank again. The man lay on his back, with his one eye staring, and his mean, livid face turned up to the tree and the sunshine. His cap had fallen off, and a shock of hay-coloured hair added to the horror of his appearance. I tried in vain to hide a qualm as I watched the soldiers passing their practised hands over his clothes; but I was alone in this. No one else seemed to feel any emotion. The dead man lay and his comrades searched him, and I heard a hundred ribald and loose things said, but not one that smacked of pity or regret. So the man had lived, without love or mercy, and so he died.

Ludwig stood up at last. "He has not the worth of his boots upon him!" he said, with a savage snarl. And he kicked the body.

"Look in his cap!" I said.

A man took it up, but only to hold it out to me. Some one had already ripped it up with a knife.

"His boots!" I suggested desperately.

In a moment they were drawn off, turned up, and shaken. But nothing fell out. The dead man had been stripped clean. There was not so much as a silver piece upon him.

We got to horse gloomily, one man the richer by his belt, another by his boots. His arms were gone already. And so we left him lying under the tree for the next traveller to bury, if he pleased. I know it has an ill sound now, but we were in an evil mood, and the times were rough.

"The dog is dead, let the dog lie!" one growled. And that was his epitaph.

With him disappeared, as it seemed to me, my last chance of recovering the lost chain. Whoever had robbed him, that was gone. A week might see it pass through a score of hands, a day might see it broken up, and spent, a link here and a link there. It was gone, and I had to face the fact and make up my mind to its consequences.

I am bound to say that the reflection gave me less pain than I could have believed possible a few hours before. Then it would almost have maddened me. Now it humbled me, but not beyond endurance, leading me to go over with a jealous eye all the particulars of my

interview with Marie, but renewing none of the shame which had attended the first discovery of my loss. By turning my head I could see the girl plodding patiently on, a little behind me in the ranks; and I turned often. It no longer pained me to meet her eyes.

An hour before sunset we crossed the brow of a low, furze-covered hill, and saw before us a shallow green valley or basin, through which the river wound in a hundred zigzags. The hovels of a small village, with one or two houses of a better size, stood dotted about the banks of the stream. Above the largest of the buildings a banner hung idly on a pole, and from this as from the centre of a circle ran out long rows of wattled huts, which in the distance looked like beehives. Endless ranks of horses stood hobbled in another place, with a forest of carts and sledges, and here a drove of oxen, and there a monstrous flock of sheep. One of the men with us blew a few notes on a trumpet; and the sound, being taken up at once and repeated, in a moment filled the mimic streets with a hurrying, buzzing crowd, that lent the scene all the animation possible.

"This is your camp?" my lady exclaimed, her eyes sparkling.

"This is my camp," General Tzerclas answered quietly. "And it and I are equally at your service."

Presently we will bid you welcome after a more fitting fashion, Countess."

"And how many men have you here?" my lady asked quickly.

"Two thousand," he answered, with a faint smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR QUARTERS.

AT this time I had never seen a camp, nor viewed any large number of armed men together, and my curiosity, as we dropped gently down the hill, while the sun set and the shadows of evening fell upon the busy scene, was mingled with some uneasiness. The babble of voices, of traders crying their wares, of men quarrelling at play, of women screaming and scolding, rose up continually as from a fair; and the nearer we approached the more like a fair, the less like my anticipations, seemed the place we were entering. I looked to see something gay and splendid, the glitter of weapons and the gleam of flags, some reflection of the rich surroundings the general allowed himself. I saw nothing of the kind; no show of ordered lines, no battalion drilling, no pageants, outposts, or sentinels. On the contrary, all before us seemed squalid, noisy, turbulent; so that as I descended into the midst of it, and left the quiet up-

lands and the evening behind us, I felt my gorge rise, and shivered as with cold.

A furlong short of the camp a troop of officers on horseback came to meet us, and saluting their general—some with hiccoughs—fell in tumultuously behind us; and their feathered hats and haphazard armour took the eye finely. But the next to meet us were of a different kind—beggars; troops of whom, men, women, and children, assailed us with loud cries, and, wailing and imploring aid, ran alongside our horses, until Tzerclas' men rode out at them and beat them off. To these succeeded a second horde, this time of gaudy, slatternly women, who hung about the entrance to the camp, with hucksters, peddlers, thieves, and the like, without number; so that our way seemed to lie through the lowest haunts of a great city. Not one in four of all I saw had the air of a soldier or counted himself one.

And this was the case inside the camp as well as outside. Everywhere booths and stalls stood among the huts, and sutlers plied their trade. Everywhere men wrangled, and women screamed, and naked children scuttered up and down. While we passed, the general's presence procured momentary respect and silence. The moment we were gone, the stream of ribaldry poured across our path, and the tide of riot set in. I saw plenty of bearded ruffians, dark men with scowling faces, chaffering, gaming or sleeping; but little that was

soldierly, little that was orderly, nothing to proclaim that this was the laager of a military force, until we had left the camp itself behind us and entered the village.

Here in a few scattered houses were the quarters of the principal officers; and here a degree of quiet and decency and some show met the eye. A watch was set in the street, which was ankle-deep in filth. A few pennons fluttered from the eaves, or before the doors. In front of the largest house a dozen cannon, the wheels locked together with chains, were drawn up, and behind the buildings were groups of tethered horses. Two trumpeters, who seemed to be waiting for us, blew a blast as we appeared, and a dozen officers on foot, some with pikes and some with partisans, came up to greet the general. But even here ugly looks and insolent faces were plentiful. The splendour was faded, the rich garments were set on awry. Hard by the cannon, in the shadow of the house, a corpse hung and dangled from the branch of an oak. The man had kicked off his shoes before he died, or some one had taken them, and the naked feet, shining in the dusk, brushed the shoulders of the passers-by.

Some might have taken it for an evil omen; I found it a good one, yet wished more than ever that we had not met General Tzerclas. But my lady, riding beside him and listening to his low-voiced talk, seemed not a

whit disappointed by what she saw, by the lack of discipline, or the sordid crowd. Either she had known better than I what to expect in camp, or she had eyes only for such brightness as existed. Possibly Von Werder's warning had so coloured my vision that I saw everything in sombre tints.

We found quarters prepared for us, not in the general's house, the large one by the cannon, but in a house of four rooms, a little farther down the street. It was convenient, it had been cleaned for us, and we found a meal awaiting us; and so far I was bound to confess that we had no ground for complaint. The general accompanied my lady to the door, and there left her with many bows, requesting permission to wait on her next day, and begging her in the mean time to send to him for anything that was lacking to her comfort.

When he was gone, and my lady had surveyed the place, she let her satisfaction be seen. The main room had been made habitable enough. She stood in her redingote, tapping the table with her whip.

"Well, Martin, this is better than the forest," she said.

"Yes, your excellency," I answered reluctantly.

"I think we have done very well," she continued thoughtfully; and she smiled to herself.

"We are safe from the rain, at any rate," I said

bluntly. My tongue itched to tell her Von Werder's warning, but Fräulein Anna and Marie Wort were in the room, and I did not think it safe to speak.

I could not stay and not tell, however, and I jumped at the first excuse for retiring. There was a kind of wooden platform in front of the houses, and running their whole length; a walk, raised out of the mud of the street and sheltered overhead by the low, wide eaves. A woman and some children had climbed on to it, and begging with their palms through the windows almost deafened us. I ran out and drove them off, and set a man in front to keep the place free. But the wretched creatures' entreaties haunted me, and when I returned I was in a worse temper than before.

The Waldgrave met me at the door, and to my surprise laid his hand on my shoulder. "This way, Martin," he said in a low voice. "I want a word with you."

I went with him across the road, and leaned against the fallen trunk of a tree, which was just visible in the darkness. Through the unglazed windows of the house we could see the lighted rooms, the Countess and her attendants moving about, Fräulein Anna sitting with her feet tucked up in a corner, the servants bringing in the meal. All in a frame of blackness, with the hoarse sounds of the camp in our ears, and the pitiful wailing

of the beggars dying away in the distance. It was a dark night, and still.

The Waldgrave laughed. "Dilly, dilly, dilly! Come and be killed," he muttered. "Two thousand soldiers? Two thousand cut-throats, Martin. Pappenheim's black riders were gentlemen beside these fellows!"

"Things may look more cheerful by daylight," I said cautiously.

"Or worse!" he answered.

I told him frankly that I thought the sooner we were out of the camp the better.

"If we can get out! Of course, it is better for the mouse when it is out of the trap!" he answered with a sneer. "But there is the rub."

"He would not dare to detain us," I said. I did not believe my own words, however.

"He will dare one of two things," the Waldgrave answered firmly, "you may be sure of that: either he will march your lady back to Heritzburg, and take possession in her name, with this tail at his heels—in which case, Heaven help her and the town. Or he will keep her here."

I tried to think that he was prejudiced in the matter, and that his jealousy of General Tzerclas led him to see evil where none was meant. But his fears agreed so exactly with my own, that I found it difficult to treat his suggestions lightly. What the camp was, I had seen;

how helpless we were in the midst of it, I knew; what advantage might be taken of us, I could imagine.

Presently I found an argument. "You forget one thing, my lord," I said. "General Tzerclas is on his way to the south. In a week we shall be with the main army at Nuremberg, and able to appeal to the King of Sweden or the Landgrave or a hundred friends, ready and willing to help us."

The Waldgrave laid his hand on my arm. "He does not intend to go south," he said.

I could not believe that; but before I could state my objections, the noisy march of a body of men approaching along the road disturbed us. The Waldgrave raised his hand and listened.

"Another time!" he muttered—already we began to fear and be secret—"Go now!"

In a trice he disappeared in the darkness, while I went more slowly into the house, where I found my lady inquiring anxiously after him. I thought that the young lord would follow me in, and I said I had seen him. But he did not come, and presently wild strains of music, rising on the air outside, took us all by surprise and effectually diverted my lady's thoughts.

The players proved to be the general's band, sent to serenade us. As the weird, strange sweetness of the air, with its southern turns and melancholy cadences, stole into the room and held the women entranced—

while moths fluttered round the lights and the servants pressed to the door to listen, and now and then a harsh scream or a distant oath betrayed the surrounding savagery—I felt my eyes drawn to my lady's face. She sat listening with a wrapt expression. Her eyes were downcast, her lashes drooped and veiled them; but some pleasant thought, some playful remembrance curved her full lips and dimpled her chin. What was the thought, I wondered? was it gratification, pleasure, complacency, or only amusement? I longed to know.

On one point I was resolved. My lady should not sleep that night until she had heard the warning I had received from Von Werder. I did all I could to catch her alone, but in the end I had to content myself with an occasion when only Fräulein Anna was with her. Time pressed, and perhaps the Dutch girl's presence confused me, or the delicacy of the position occurred to me *in mediis rebus*, as I think the Fräulein called it. At any rate, I blurted out the story a little too roughly, and found myself called sharply to order.

"Stay!" my lady said abruptly, and I saw too late that her colour was high. "Not so fast, man! I think, Martin, that since we left Heritzburg you have lost some of your manners! See to it, you recover them. Who told you this tale?"

"Herr von Werder," I answered with humility; and I was going on with my story. But she raised her hand.

"Herr von Werder!" she said haughtily. "Who is he?"

"The gentleman who supped with us last night," I reminded her.

She stamped the floor impatiently. "Fool!" she cried, "I know that! But who is he? Who is he? He should be some great man to prate of my affairs so lightly."

I stuttered and stammered, and felt my cheek redden with shame. *I did not know.* And the man was not here, and I could not reproduce for her the air of authority, the tone and look which had imposed on me: which had given weight to words I might otherwise have slighted, and importance to a warning that I now remembered was a stranger's. I stood, looking foolish.

My lady saw her advantage. "Well," she said harshly, "who is he? Out with it, man! Do not keep us waiting."

I muttered that I knew no more of him than his name.

"Perhaps not that," she retorted scornfully.

I admitted that it might be so.

My lady's eyes sparkled and her cheeks flamed. "Before Heaven, you are a fool!" she cried in a passion. "How dare you come to me with such a story? How dare you traduce a man without proof or warranty!"

And my cousin! Why, it passes belief. On the word of a nameless wanderer admitted to our table on sufferance you accuse an honourable gentleman, our kinsman and our host, of—Heaven knows of what, I don't! I tell you, you shame me!" she continued vehemently. "You abuse my kindness. You abuse the shelter given to us. You must be mad, stark mad, to think such things. Or——"

She stopped on a sudden and looked down frowning. When she looked up again her face was changed. "Tell me," she said in a hard, constrained voice, "did any one—did the Waldgrave Rupert suggest this to you?"

"God forbid!" I cried.

The answer seemed to embarrass her. "Where is he?" she asked, looking at me suspiciously.

I told her that I did not know.

"Why did he not come to supper?" she persisted.

Again I said I did not know.

"You are a fool!" she replied sharply. But I saw that her anger had died down. I was not surprised when she continued in a changed tone, "Tell me; what has General Tzerclas done to you that you dislike him so? What is your grudge against him, Martin?"

"I have no grudge against him, your excellency," I answered.

"You dislike him?"

I looked down and kept silence.

"I see you do," my lady continued. "Why? Tell me why, Martin."

But I felt so certain that every word I said against him would in her present mood only set him higher in her favour that I was resolved not to answer. At last, being pressed, I told her that I distrusted him as a soldier of fortune—a class the country folk everywhere hold in abhorrence; and that nothing I had seen in his camp had tended to lessen the feeling.

"A soldier of fortune!" she replied, with a slight tinge of wonder and scorn. "What of that? My uncle was one. Lord Craven, the Englishman, the truest knight-errant that ever followed banished queen—if all I hear be true—he is one; and his comrade, the Lord Horace Vere. And Count Leslie, the Scotchman, who commands in Stralsund for the Swede, I never heard aught but good of him. And Count Thurn of Bohemia—him I know. He is a brave man and honourable. A soldier of fortune!" my lady continued thoughtfully, tapping the table with her fingers. "And why not? Why not?"

My choler rose at her words. "He has the sweepings of Germany in his train," I muttered. "Look at his camp, my lady."

She shrugged her shoulders. "A camp is not a nunnery," she said pithily. "At any rate, he is on the right side," she added.

"His own!" I exclaimed.

"I could have bitten my tongue the next moment, but it was too late. My lady looked at me sternly. "You grow too quick-witted," she said. "I have talked too much to you, I see. I am no longer in Heritzburg, but I will be respected, Martin. Go! go at once, and to-morrow be more careful."

Result—that I had offended her and done no good. I wondered what the Waldgrave would say, and I went to bed with a heart full of fancies and forebodings, that, battenning on themselves, grew stronger and more formidable the longer I lay awake. The night was well advanced and the immediate neighbourhood of our quarters was quiet. The sentry's footsteps echoed monotonously as he tramped up and down the wooden platform before them. I could almost hear the breathing of the sleepers in the other rooms, the creak of the floor as one rose or another turned. There was nothing to keep me from sleep.

But my thoughts would not be confined to the four walls or the neighbourhood; my ears lent themselves to every sound that came from the encircling camp, the coarse song chanted by drunken revellers, the oath of anger, the shrill taunt, the cry of surprise. And once, a little before midnight, I heard something more than these: a sudden roar of voices that swelled up and up, louder and fiercer, and then died in a moment into silence—to be followed an instant later by fierce screams

of pain—shriek upon shriek of such mortal agony and writhing that I sat up on my pallet, trembling all over and bathed in perspiration; and even the sleepers turned and moaned in their dreams. The cries grew fainter. Then, thank Heaven! silence.

But the incident left me in no better mood for sleep, and with every nerve on the stretch I was turning on the other side for the twentieth time when I fancied I heard whispering outside; a faint muttering as of some one talking to the sentinel. The sentry's step still kept time regularly, however, and I was beginning to think that my imagination had played me a trick, when the creak of a door inside, followed by a rustling sound, confirmed my suspicions. I rose quietly to my feet. The next instant a low scream and the harsh voice of the watchman told me that something had happened.

I passed out of the house quickly, without alarming any one, and was not surprised to find Jacob pinning a captive against the wall with one hand, while he threatened him with his pike. There was just light enough to see this, and no more, the wide eaves casting a black shadow on the prisoner's face.

"What is it, Jacob?" I exclaimed, going to his assistance. "Whom have you got?"

"I do not know," he answered sturdily, "but I'll keep him. He was trying to get in or out. Steady

now," he added gruffly to his captive, "or I will spoil your beauty for you!"

"In or out?" I said.

"Ay, I think he was coming out?"

There was a fire burning in the road a score of paces away. I ran to it and fetched a brand, and blowing the smouldering wood into a blaze, threw the light on the fellow's face. Jacob dropped his hand with a cry of surprise, and I recoiled. His prisoner was a woman—Marie Wort.

She hung down her head, trembling violently. Jacob had thrust back the hood from her face, and her loosened hair covered her shoulders.

"What does it mean?" I cried, struggling with my bewilderment. "Why are you here, girl?"

Instead of answering, she cowered nearer the wall, and I saw that she was trying to hide something behind her under cover of her cloak.

"What have you got there?" I said quickly, laying my hand on her wrist.

She flashed a look at me, her small teeth parted, a mutinous glare on her little, pale face. "Not my chain!" she snapped.

I dropped her arm and recoiled as if she had struck me; though the words did not so much hurt as surprise me. And I was quick to recover myself.

"What is it, then?" I said, returning to the attack.

"I must know, Marie, and what you are doing here at this time of night."

As she did not answer I put her cloak aside, and discovered, to my great astonishment, that she was holding a platter full of food. It shook in her hand. She began to cry.

"Heavens, girl!" I exclaimed in my wonder, "have you not had enough to eat?"

She lifted her head and looked at me through her tears, her eyes sparkling with indignation. "I have!" she said almost fiercely. "But what of these?"—and she flung her disengaged hand abroad, with a gesture I did not at once comprehend. "Can you sleep in their beds, and lie in their houses, and eat from their meal-tubs, and think of them starving, and *not* get up and help them? Can you hear them whining for food like dogs, and starve them as you would not starve a dog? I cannot. I cannot!" she repeated wildly. "But you, you others, you of the north, you have no hearts! You lie soft and care nothing!"

"But what—who are starving?" I said in amazement. Her words outran my wits. "And where is the man in whose bed I am lying?"

"Under the sky! In the ditch!" she answered passionately. "Are you blind?" she continued, speaking more quietly and drawing nearer. "Do you think your general built this village? If not, where are the people

who lived in it a month ago? Whining for a crust at the camp gate. Living on offal, or starving. Fighting with the dogs for bones. I heard a man outside this house cry that it was all his, and that he was starving. You drove him off. I heard his wife and babes wailing outside a while ago, and I came out. I could not bear it."

I looked at Jacob. He nodded gravely. "There was a woman here, with a child," he said.

"Heaven forgive us!" I cried. Then—"Go in, girl," I continued. "I will see the food put where they will get it; but do you go to bed."

She obeyed meekly, leaving me wondering at the strange mixture of courage and fearfulness which makes up some women, and those the best; who fly from a rat, yet face every extremity of pain without flinching. A Romanist? And what of that? It seemed to me a small thing, as I watched her gliding in. If she knew little and that awry, she loved much.

I looked at Jacob and he at me. "Is it true, do you think?" I said.

"I doubt it is," he answered stolidly, dropping the smouldering brand on the ground and treading it out with his heel. "I have seen soldiers and sutlers and women since I came into camp; and beggars. But peasants not one. I doubt we have eaten them out, Master Martin. But soldiers must live."

The little heap of red embers glowed dully in the road and gave no light. The darkness shut us in on every side, even as the camp shut us in. I looked out into it and shuddered. It seemed to my eyes peopled with horrors: with gaping mouths that cursed us as they set in death, with lean hands that threatened us, and tortured faces of maids and children; with the despair of the poor. Ghosts of starving men and women glared at us out of spectral eyes. And the night seemed full of omens.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OPENING OF A DUEL.

I NEVER knew where the Waldgrave spent that night, but I think it must have been with the fairies. For when he showed himself early next morning, before my lady appeared, I noticed at once a change in him; and though at first I was at a loss to explain it, I presently saw that that had happened which might have been expected. The appearance of a rival had laid the spark to his heart, and while the love-light was in his eyes, a new gravity, a new gentleness added grace to his bearing. The temper and pettiness of yesterday were gone. Other things, too, I saw—that his face flushed when my lady's voice was heard at the door, that his eyes shone when she entered. He had a nosegay of flowers

for her—wild flowers he had gathered in the early morning, with the dew upon them—which he offered her with a little touch of humility.

Doubtless the fret and passion of yesterday had not been thrown away on him. He had learned in the night both that he loved, and the lowliness that comes of love. It wanted but that, it seemed to me, to make him perfect in a woman's eyes; and I saw my lady's dwell very kindly on him as he turned away. A little, I think, she wondered; his tone was so different, his desire to please so transparent, his avoidance of everything that might offend so ready. But such service wins its way; and my lady's own kindness and gaiety disposing her to meet his advances, she seemed in a few moments to have forgotten whatever cause of complaint he had given her.

The general's band came early to play while she ate, but I noticed with satisfaction that the music moved her little this morning, either because she was taken up with talking to her companion, or because the romantic circumstances of the evening, darkness and vague surroundings, and the lassitude of fatigue, were lacking. With the sunshine and fresh air pouring in through the open windows, the strains which yesterday awoke a hundred associations and stirred mysterious impulses fell almost flat.

The Waldgrave made no attempt to resume the

conversation he had held with me by the fallen tree. Either love, or respect for his mistress, made him reticent, or he was practising self-control. And I said nothing. But I understood, and set myself keenly to watch this duel between the two men. If I read the general's intentions aright, the young lord's influence with the Countess could scarcely grow except at the general's expense; his suit, if successful, must oust that which the elder man meditated. And this being so, all my wishes were on one side. My fear of the general had so grown in the night, that I suspected him of a hundred things, and could only think of him as an antagonist to be defeated—a foe from whom we must expect the worst that force or fraud could effect.

He came soon after breakfast to pay his respects to my lady, and alighted at the door with great attendance and endless jingling of bits and spurs. He brought with him several of his officers, and these he presented to the Countess with so much respect and politeness that even I could find no fault with the action. One or two of the men, rough Silesians, were uncouth enough; but he covered their mistakes so cleverly that they served only to set off his own good breeding.

He had not been in the room five minutes, however, before I saw that he remarked the change which had come over the Waldgrave, and perhaps some corresponding change in my lady's manner; and I saw that it

chafed him. He did not lose his air of composure, but he grew less talkative and more observant. Presently he let drop something aimed at the young man; a light word, inoffensive, yet likely to draw the other into a debate. But the Waldgrave refrained, and the general soon afterwards rose to take leave.

He had come, it seemed, to invite my lady's presence at a shooting-match which was to take place outside the camp at noon. He spoke of the match as a thing arranged before our arrival, but I have no doubt that the plan had its origin in a desire to please my lady and fill the day. He spoke, besides, of a hunting-party to take place next morning, with a banquet at his quarters to follow; of a review fixed for the day after that; and, in the still remoter distance, of races and a trip to a certain waterfall, with other diversions.

I heard the arrangements made, and my lady's frank acceptance, with a sinking heart; for under the perfect courtesy of his manner, behind the frank desire to give her pleasure which he professed, I felt his power. While he spoke, though I could find no fault with him, I felt the steel hand inside the silk glove. And these plans? Even my lady, though her eyes sparkled with anticipation—she loved pleasure with a healthy, honest love—looked a little startled.

“But I thought that you were marching southwards, General Tzerclas,” she said. “At once I mean?”

"I am," he answered, bowing easily—he had already risen. "But an army, Countess, marches more slowly than a travelling party. And I am expecting despatches which may vary my route."

"From the King of Sweden?" she asked naïvely.

"Yes," he answered. "The King has arrived at Nuremberg, and expects shortly to be attacked by Wallenstein, who is on the march from Egra."

"But shall you be in time for the battle?" my lady cried, her eyes shining.

"I hope so," he replied, smiling. "Or my part may be less glorious—to cut off the enemy's convoys."

"I should not like that!" she exclaimed.

"Nevertheless, it is a very necessary function," he said. "As the Waldgrave Rupert will tell your excellency."

The young lord agreed, and a moment after that the general with his jingling attendants took his leave and clattered out and mounted before the door. My lady went to the window and waved adieu to him, and he lowered his great plumed hat to his stirrup.

"At noon?" he cried, making his horse curvet in the roadway.

"Without fail!" my lady answered gaily, and she stood at the window looking out until the last gleam of steel sank in a cloud of dust and the beggars closed in before the door.

The Waldgrave leaned against the wall behind her with his lips set and a grave face. But he said nothing, and when she turned he had a smile for her. It seemed to me that these two had changed places; the Waldgrave had grown older and my lady younger.

A few minutes before noon, Captain Ludwig and a sub-officer of the same rank, a Pole with long hair, came to conduct my lady to the scene of the match. They were arrayed in all their finery, and had on besides their best behaviour. We did not keep them waiting; five minutes saw us mounted and riding through the camp. This wore, to-day, a more martial and less disorderly appearance. The part we traversed was clear of women and gamesters, while sentries stationed at the gate, and a guard of honour which fell in behind us at the same spot, proved that the eye of the master could even here turn chaos into order. I do not know that the change pleased me much. If it lessened my dread of the cut-throats by whom we were surrounded, it increased the awe in which I held their chief.

The shooting was fixed to take place in a narrow valley diverging from the river, a mile or more from the camp. It was a green, gently sloping place, such as sheep love; but the sheep had long ago been driven into quarters, and the shepherd to the listing-sergeant or the pike. A few ruined huts told the tale; the hills which rose on either side were silent and untrodden.

Not so the valley itself, which lay bathed in sunshine. It roared with the battle of a great multitude. A straight course, two hundred yards in length, had been roped off for the shooting, and round this the crowd thronged and pushed, or, breaking here or there into fragments, wandered up and down outside the lines, talking and gesticulating, so that the place seemed to swarm with life and movement and colour.

I had seen such a spectacle and as large a crowd at Heritzburg—once a year, it may be. But there the gathering had not the wild and savage elements which here caught the eye; the hairy, swarthy faces, the black, gleaming eyes, the wild garb, and brandished weapons and fierce gestures, that made this crowd at once curious and formidable. The babel of unknown tongues rose on every side. Poland and Lithuania, Scotland and the Rhine, equally with Hungary, Italy, and Bohemia, had their representatives in this strange army.

General Tzerclas and his staff occupied a mound near the lower end of the valley. On seeing our little party approach, he rode down to meet us, followed by thirty or forty officers, whose dress and equipments, even more than those of their men, fixed the attention; for while some wore steel caps and clumsy cuirasses, with silk sashes and greasy trunk-hose, others, better acquainted with the mode, affected huge flapped hats and velvet doublets, with falling collars of lace, and un-

tanned boots reaching to the middle of the thigh. One or two wore almost complete armour; others, gay silks, stained with wine and weather. Their horses, too, were of all sizes, from tall Flemings to small, wiry Hungarians, and their arms were as various. One huge fat man, whose flesh swayed as he moved, carried a steel mace at his saddle-bow. Another swept along with a lance, raking the sky behind him. Great horse-pistols were common, and swords with blades so long that they ploughed the ground.

Varying in everything else, in one thing these war-like gentry agreed. As they came prancing towards us, I did not see a face among them that did not repel me, not one I could look at with respect or liking.

Where dissipation had not set its seal so plainly as to oust all others, or some old wound did not disfigure, cruelty, greed, and recklessness were written large. The glare of the bully shone under flapped hat and iron cap alike. One might show a swollen visage, flushed with excess, and another a thin, white, cruel face; but that was all the odds.

The sight of such a crew should have opened my lady's eyes and enlightened her as to the position in which we stood. But women see differently from men. Too often they take swagger for courage, and recklessness for manhood. And, besides, the very defects of these men, their swashbuckling manners and banditti

guise, only set off the more the perfect dress and quiet bearing of their leader, who, riding in their midst, seemed, with his cold, calm face and air of pride, like nothing so much as the fairy prince among the swine.

He wore a suit of black velvet, with a falling collar of Utrecht lace, and a white sash. A feather adorned his hat, and his furniture and sword-hilt were of steel. This, I afterwards learned, was a favourite costume with him. At odd times he relapsed into finery, but commonly he affected a simplicity which suited his air and features, and lost nothing by comparison with the tawdriness of his attendants.

He sprang from his horse at the foot of the slope, and, resigning it to a groom, took my lady's rein and, bare-headed, led her to the summit of the mound. The Waldgrave with Fräulein Anna followed, and the rest of us as closely as we could. The officers crowded thick upon us and would have edged us out, but I had primed my men, and though they quailed before the others' scowls and curses, they kept together, so that we not only had the advantage of watching the sport from a position immediately behind the Countess, but heard all that passed.

At the end of the open space I have mentioned stood three targets in a line. These were peculiar, for they consisted of dummies cased in leather, shaped so

exactly to the form of men, that, at a distance of two hundred yards, it was only by the face one could tell that they were not men. Where the features should have been was a whitened circle, and on the breast of each a heart in chalk. They were so life-like that they gave an air of savagery to the sport; they made me shudder. When I had scanned them, I turned and found Captain Ludwig at my elbow.

"What is it?" he said, grinning. "Our targets? Fine practice, comrade. They are the general's own invention, and I have known them put to good use."

"How?" I asked. He spoke under his breath. I adopted the same tone.

"You will know presently," he answered, with a wink. "Sometimes we find a traitor in the camp; or we catch a spy. Then—but you need not fear. Drawing-room practice to-day. There is no one in them."

"In them?" I muttered, unable to take my eyes from his face.

He nodded. "Ay, in them," he answered, smiling at my look of consternation. "Time has been I have known one in each, and cross-bow practice. That makes them squeal! With powder and a flint-lock—pouf! It is all over. Unless you put the butter-fingers first; then there is sport, perhaps."

I grew sick with horror. I paid no attention to the shooting, which had begun, nor to the brawling and

disagreement which from the first accompanied it, and which it needed all the general's authority to quell. I thought only of our position among these wretches. If I had felt any doubt of General Tzerclas' character before, the doubt troubled me no more.

But it did occur to me that Ludwig might be practising on me, and I turned to him sharply. "I see!" I said, pretending I had found him out. "A good joke, captain!"

He grinned again. "You would not call it one," he said dryly, "if you were once in the leather. But have it your own way. Come! There is a good shot, now. He is a Swiss, that fellow."

But I could take no interest in the shooting, with that ghastly tale in my head. I felt for the moment the veriest coward. We were ten in the midst of two thousand—ten men and four helpless women! Our own strength could not avail us, and we had nothing else under heaven to depend upon, except the scruples, or interest, or fears of a mercenary captain; a man whose hardness the thin veil of politeness barely hid, who might be scrupulous, gentle, merciful—might be, in a word, all that was honourable. But whence, then, this story? Why this tale of cruelty, passing all bounds of discipline?

It so disheartened me that for some time I scarcely noticed what was passing before me; and I might have continued longer in this dull state if the Waldgrave's

voice, civilly declining some proposition, had not caught my ear.

I gathered then what the proposition was. Among the matches was one for officers, and in this the general was politely inviting his guest to compete.

But the Waldgrave continued firm. "You are very good," he answered with perfect frankness and good temper. "But I think I will not expose myself. I shoot badly with a strange gun."

It was so unlike him to miss a chance of distinction, or underrate his own merits, that I stared. He was changed, indeed, to-day; or he thought the position very critical, the need of caution very great.

The general continued to urge him; so that I began to think that our host had his own interests to serve.

"Oh, come," he said, in a light, gibing tone which just stopped short of the offensive. "You must not decline. There are five competitors—two Bohemians, a Scot, a Pole, and a Walloon; but no German. You cannot refuse to shoot for Germany, Waldgrave?"

The Waldgrave shook his head, however. "I should do Germany small honour, I am afraid," he said.

The general smiled unpleasantly. "You are too modest," he said.

"It is not a national failing," the Waldgrave answered, smiling also.

"I fancy it must be," the general retorted. "And

that is the reason we see so little of Germans in the war!"

The words were almost an insult, though a dull man, deceived by the civility of the speaker's tone, might have overlooked it. The Waldgrave understood, however. I saw him redden and his brow grow dark. But he restrained himself, and even found a good answer.

"Germany will find her champions," he said, "when she seriously needs them."

"Abroad!" the general replied, speaking in a flash, as it were. The instant the word was said, I saw that he repented it. He had gone farther than he intended, and changed his tone. "Well, if you will not, you will not," he continued smoothly. "Unless our fair cousin can succeed where I have failed, and persuade you."

"I?" my lady said—she had not been attending very closely. "I will do what I can. Why will you not enter, Rupert? You are a good shot."

"You wish me to shoot?" the young lord said slowly.

"Of course!" she answered. "I think it is a shame General Tzerclas has so few German officers. If I could shoot, I would shoot for the honour of Germany myself."

The Waldgrave bowed. "I will shoot," he said coldly.

"Good!" General Tzerclas cried, with a show of *bonhomie*. "That is excellent. Will you descend with me? Each competitor is to fire two shots at the figure

at a hundred and twenty paces. Those who lodge both shots in the target, to fire one shot at the head only."

The young lord bowed and prepared to follow him.

"Comrade," Ludwig said in my ear, as I watched them go, "your master had better have stood by his first word."

"Why?"

"He will do no good."

"Why not?" I asked angrily.

"The Bohemian yonder—the fat man—will shoot round him. His little pig's eyes see farther than others. Besides, the devil has blessed his gun. He cannot miss."

"What! That tun of flesh?" I cried, for he was pointing to the gross, unwieldy man, at whose saddle-bow I had marked the iron mace. "Is he a Bohemian?"

Ludwig nodded. "Count Waska, they call him. There is no man in the camp can shoot with him or drink with him."

"We shall see," I said grimly.

I had little hope, however. The Waldgrave was a good shot; but a man was not likely to have a reputation for shooting in such a camp as this, where every one handled pistol or petronel, unless his aim was something out of the common. And listening to the talk round me, I found that Count Waska's comrades took his victory for granted.

Their confidence explained General Tzerclas' anxiety

to trap the Waldgrave into shooting. The jealous feeling which had been all on the Waldgrave's side yesterday, had spread to him to-day. He wished to see his rival beaten in my lady's presence.

I longed to disappoint him; and I felt sore besides for the honour of Germany. I could not leave my lady, or I would have gone down to see that the Waldgrave had fair play, and a clean pan, and silence when he fired. But I watched with as much excitement as any in the field, all that passed; I doubt if I ever took part in a match myself with greater keenness and interest than I felt as a spectator of this one.

From our elevated position we could see everything, and the sight was a curious one. The rabble of spectators—soldiers and women, sutlers and horse-boys—stretched away in two dark lines, ten deep, being kept off the range by a dozen men armed with whips. The clamour of their hoarse shouting went up continuously, and sometimes almost deafened us. Immediately below us, at the foot of the mound, the champions and their friends were gathered, settling rests, keying up the wheels of their locks, and trying the flints. Owing to the Waldgrave's presence, which somewhat imposed upon the other officers both by reason of his rank and strangeness, the contest seemed likely to be conducted more decently than those which had preceded it. He was invited to shoot first, and when he excused

himself on the ground that he was not yet familiar with his gun, Count Waska good-humouredly consented to open the match.

His weapon, I remarked—and I treasured up the knowledge and have since made use of it—was smaller in the bore than the others. He came forward and fired very carelessly, scarcely stooping to the rest; but he hit the figure fairly in the breast with both bullets and retired, a stolid smile on his large countenance.

The Waldgrave was the next to advance, and if he felt one half of the anxiety I felt myself, it was a wonder he let off his gun at all. General Tzerclas had returned to the Countess's side, and was speaking to her; but he paused at the critical moment, and both stood gazing, my lady with her lips half parted and her eyes bright. The desire to see the stranger shoot was so general that something like silence prevailed while he aimed. I had time to conjure up half a dozen miseries—the gun might not be true, the powder weak; and then, bang! I saw the figure rock. He had hit it fairly in the breast, and I breathed again.

“My lady cried, “Vivat! good shot!” and he looked up at her before he primed his pan for a second trial. This time I felt less fear, the crowd less interest. The babel began afresh. His second bullet struck somewhat lower, but struck; and he stood back, his face flushed with pleasure. Honour, at any rate, was safe.

The Scot hit with both balls, the Pole with one only. Last of all the Walloon, a grim dark officer in a stained buff coat, who seemed to be unpopular with the soldiery, fired in the midst of such a storm of gibes and hisses that I wondered he could aim at all. He did, however, and hit with his second bullet. Even so he and the Pole stood out, leaving the Waldgrave, Count Waska, and the Scot to fire at the head.

Huge was the clamour which followed on this. Half the company bellowed out offers to stake all they had on the Count—money, chains, armour. Meanwhile I looked at the general to see how he took it. He had fallen silent, and my lady also. They stood gazing down on the competitors and their preparations, as if they were aware that more hung on the issue than a simple match at arms.

Count Waska advanced for the final shot, and this time he made ample use of the rest, aiming long and carefully over it. He fired, and I looked eagerly at the target. A roar of applause greeted the shot. The bullet had pierced the whitened face a little to the left, high up.

It was the Waldgrave's turn now. He came forward, with an air of quiet confidence, and set his weapon on the crutch. This time two or three voices were raised, gibing him; the crowd was growing jealous of its champion's reputation. I longed to be down

among them, and I saw my lady's eyes flash and her colour rise. She looked indignantly at Tzerclas. But the general's face was set. He did not seem to hear.

"Flash! Plop! In a moment I was shouting with the rest, shouting lustily for the honour of the house! The Waldgrave had lodged his ball in the upper part of the face towards the right-hand side. If Waska had put in the one eye, he had put in the other.

We shouted. But the camp hung silent, gloomily wondering whether this were luck or skill. And the general stood silent too. It was not until my lady had cried, "Vivat! Vivat Weimar!" in her frank, cheery voice, that he spoke and echoed the compliment.

When he had spoken, sullen silence fell upon the crowd again. I saw men look at us—not pleasantly; until the Scot by taking his place at the crutch diverted their attention. It seemed to me that he was an hour arranging the rest and his weapon, scraping his priming this way and that, and putting in a fresh flint at the last moment. At length he fired. A roar of laughter followed. He had missed the target altogether.

How it was arranged I do not know, but we saw at once that Waska and the Waldgrave were about to take another shot. The Bohemian, as he levelled his weapon with care, looked up at us.

"We have put in his eyes," he said in his guttural

tones. "I propose to put in his nose. If his excellency can better that, I give him the bone."

He aimed very diligently, amid such a silence you could have heard a feather drop, and fired. He did as he had promised. His ball pierced the very middle of the face, a little below and between the two shots.

A perfect roar of applause greeted the achievement. Even we who felt our honour at stake shouted with the rest and threw up our caps; while my lady took off in her admiration a slender gold chain which she wore round her neck and flung it to the champion, crying "Vivat Bohemia! Vivat Waska!"

He bowed with grotesque gallantry, and one of the bystanders picked up the chain and gave it to him. We smiled; for, too fat to kneel or stoop, he could no more have recovered the gift himself than he could have taken wings and flown. Fräulein Anna muttered something about Tantalus and water, but I did not understand her, and in a moment the Waldgrave gave me something else to think about.

He stepped forward when the noise and cheering had somewhat subsided, and like his antagonist he looked up also.

"I do not see what there is left for me to do," he said, with a gallant air. "I could give him a mouth, but I fear I may set it on awry."

Thrice he took aim, and, dissatisfied, forebore to

fire. The crowd, silent at first, and confident of their champion's victory, began to jeer. At length he pulled. Plop! The smoke cleared away. An inch below Waska's last shot appeared another orifice. The Waldgrave had put in the mouth.

We waved our caps and shouted until we were hoarse; and the crowd shouted. But it soon became evident, amid the universal clamour and uproar, that there were two parties: one acclaiming the Waldgrave's success, and another and larger one crying fiercely that he was beaten—that he was beaten! that his shot was not so near the centre of the target as Count Waska's. The Waldgrave's promise to make the mouth had been heard by a few only, mainly his friends; and while these, headed by the Bohemian, who showed that his clumsy carcase still contained some sparks of chivalry, tried to explain the matter to others, the camp with one voice bellowed against him, the more excited brandishing fists and weapons in the air, while the less moved kept up a stubborn and monotonous chant of "Waska! Waska! Waska!"

The only person unaffected by the tumult appeared to be the Waldgrave himself; who stood looking up at us in silence, a smile on his face. Presently, the noise still continuing, I saw him clap Count Waska on the shoulder, and the two shook hands. The Count seemed by his gestures—for the uproar and tumult were so

great that all was done in dumb show—to be deprecating his retreat. But the younger man persisted, and by-and-by, after saluting the other competitors, he turned away, and began to force his way up the mound towards us. It was time he did; the crowd had burst its bounds and flooded the range. The scene below was now a sea of wild confusion.

Such an ending seemed stupid in the extreme; in any place where ordinary discipline prevailed, it would have been easy to procure silence and restore order. And my lady, her face flushed with indignation, turned impatiently to the general, to see if he would not interfere. But he was, or he affected to be, powerless. He shrugged his shoulders with an indulgent smile, and a moment later, seeing the Waldgrave on his way to join us and the crowd still persistent, he gave the word to retire. The officers who in the last hour had pressed on us inconveniently, fell back, and waiting only for the Waldgrave to reach his horse, we rode down the mound, and turned our faces towards the camp.

For a space, and while the uproar still rang in my ears, I could scarcely speak for indignation. Then came a reaction. I saw my lady's face as she rode alongside the Waldgrave and talked to him. And my spirits rose. General Tzerclas had the place on her other hand, but she had not a word for him. It was not so much that the young lord had distinguished him-

self and done well, but that in an awkward position he had borne himself with dignity and self-control. That pleased her.

I saw her eyes shine as she looked at him, and her mouth grow tender; and I told myself with exultation that the Waldgrave had done something more than rival Waska—he had scored the first hit in the fight, and that no light one. The general would be wise, if he looked to his guard; fortunate, if he did not look too late.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL CONTINUED.

I FELL to wondering, as we rode home, whether we should find all safe; for we had left Marie Wort and my lady's woman to keep house with two only of the men. From that, again, I strayed into thoughts of the chain, and of Marie herself, so that the very head of what happened when we reached the house escaped me. The first I knew of it, Fräulein Anna's horse backed suddenly into mine, and brought us all up short with a deal of jostling and plunging. When I looked forward to learn what was amiss, I saw a man lying on his face right under my lady's horse, and so near it that the beast's feet were touching his head.

The man was crying out something in a pitiful tone, and two or three of the general's officers who were riding abreast of me were swearing roundly, and there was great confusion.

General Tzerclas said something, I fancy, but my lady overbore him. "What is it?" I heard her cry. "Get up, man, and speak. Don't lie there. What is it?"

The man rose to his knees, and cried out, "Justice, justice, lady!" in a wild sort of way, adding something—which I could not understand, for he spoke in a vile *patois*—about a house. He was in a miserable plight, and looked scarcely human. His face was sallow, his eyes shone with famine, his shrunken limbs peered through mud-stained rags that only half covered him.

"Which is your house?" my lady asked gently. And when one of the officers who had ridden up abreast of her would have intervened, she raised her hand with a gesture there was no mistaking. "Which is your house?" she repeated.

The man pointed to the one in which we had our quarters.

"What! That one?" my lady cried incredulously. "Then what has brought you to this?" she asked. For the creature looked the veriest scarecrow that ever hung about a church-porch. His head and feet had no cover-

ing, his hair was foully matted. He was filthy, hideous, famine-stricken.

And desperate. For, half-cringing, half-defiant, he pointed his accusing finger at the general. "He has! He and his army!" he cried wildly. "That house was mine. Those fields were mine. I had cattle, they have eaten them. I had wood, they have burned it. I had meat, they have taken it. I was rich, and I am *this*! I had, and I have not—only a wife and babes, and they are dying in a ditch. May the curse of God——"

"Hush!" my lady cried, in an unsteady voice. And, without adding a word, she turned to General Tzerclas and looked at him; as if this were Heritzburg, and she the judge, he the criminal.

Doubtless the position was an awkward one. But he showed himself equal to it. "There has been foul play here," he said firmly. "I think I remember the man's face." Then he turned and raised his hand. "Let all stand back," he said in a stern, curt tone.

We fell back out of hearing, leaving him and my lady with the man. For some time the general seemed to be putting questions to the fellow, speaking to my mistress between whiles. Presently he called sharply for Ludwig. The captain went forward to them, and then it was very plain what was going on, for the general raised his voice, and made the rating he administered to his subaltern audible even by us.

Back Ludwig came by-and-by, with a dark sneer on his face, and we saw the general hand money to the man.

"Teufel!" one of the fellows who rode beside me muttered, surprise in his voice. "When the general gives, look to your necks. It will cost some one dear, this! I would not be in that clod's shoes for his booty ten times told!"

Possibly. But I was not so much interested on the clown's account as on my lady's; and one needed only half an eye to see what the general's liberality had effected with her. She was all smiles again, speaking to him with the utmost animation, leaning towards him as she rode. She forgot the Waldgrave, who had fallen back with the rest of us; she forgot all but the general. He went with her to the door of the house, gave his hand to help her to dismount, lingered talking to her on the threshold. My heart sank. I could have gnashed my teeth with anger as I stood aside uncovered, waiting for him to go.

For how could we combat the man? Such an episode as this, which should have opened my lady's eyes to his true character, served only to restore him to favour and blind her more effectually. It had undone all the good of the afternoon; it had effaced alike the Waldgrave's success and the general's remissness; it had given Tzerclas, who all day had been losing slowly,

the upper hand once more. I felt the disappointment keenly.

I suppose it was that which made me think of consulting Fräulein Anna, and begging her to use her influence with my lady to get out of the camp. At any rate, the idea occurred to me. I could not catch her then; but later in the evening, when some acrobats, whom the general had sent for the Countess's diversion, were performing outside, and my lady had gone out to the fallen tree to see them the better, I found the Fräulein alone in the outer room. She looked up at my entrance.

"Who is it?" she said sharply, peering at me with her white, short-sighted face. "Oh, it is you, Mr. Thick-head, is it? I know whom you have sneaked in to see!" she added spitefully.

"That is well," I answered civilly. "For I came in to see you, Fräulein."

"Oh!" she retorted, nodding her head in a very unpleasant manner. "Then you want something. I can guess what it is. But go on."

"If I want something," I answered, "and I do, it is in your own behalf, Fräulein. You heard what I said to my lady last night? I did not persuade her. Can you persuade her—to leave the camp and its commander?"

Fräulein Max shook her head. "Why should I?"

she said, smoothing out her skirt with her hands, and looking at me with a cunning smile. "What have I to gain by persuading her, Master Schwartz?"

"Safety," I said boldly.

"Oh!" she cried ironically. "Then let me remind you of something. When we were all safe and comfortable at Heritzburg—safe, mind you—who was it disturbed us? Who was it stirred up my lady to make trouble—*more improbi anseris*—and though I warned him what would come of it, persisted in it until we had all to flee at night like so many vagrants? Ay, and have never had a quiet night since! Who was that, Master Martin?"

"Fräulein," I answered patiently, forbearing to remind her how much she had been herself in fault, "I may have been wrong then. But it does not alter the situation now."

"Does it not?" she replied. "But I think it does. You had your way at Heritzburg, and what came of it? Trouble and misery. You want your way now, but I shall not help you to it. I have had enough of your way, and I do not like it."

She laughed triumphantly, seeing me silenced; and I stood looking at her, wondering what argument I could use. Doubtless she had had a comfortless time on the journey from Heritzburg, jogging through fords and over ruts, and along steep places, wet, tired, and

scared, deprived of her books and all her home pleasures. She had had time and to spare to lay up many a grudge against me. Now it was her turn, and I read in her face her determination to make the most of it.

I might frighten her; and that seemed my only chance. "Well, Fräulein," I said after a pause, "you may have been right then, and you may be right now. But I hope you have counted the cost. If my lady shows herself determined to leave, to-morrow and perhaps the next day the power of going will remain in her hands. Later it will have passed from her. Familiarity breeds contempt, Fräulein, and even the Countess of Heritzburg cannot stay long in such a camp as this, where nothing is respected, without losing that respect which for the moment protects her. In a day or two, in a few days, the hedge will fall. And then, Fräulein, we may all look to ourselves."

But Fräulein Anna laughed shrilly. "*O tu anser!*" she cried contemptuously. "Open your eyes! Cannot you see that the general is knee-deep in love with her? In a week he will be head over ears, and her slave!"

I stared at her. Doubtless she knew; she was a woman. I drew a deep breath. "Well," I said, "and what of that?"

She looked at me spitefully. "Ask my lady!" she said. "How should I know?"

I returned her gaze, and thought awhile. Then I

said coldly, "I think it is you who are the fool, Fräulein. Take it for granted that what you tell me is true. Have you considered what will happen should my lady repulse him? What will happen to her and to us?"

"She will not," Fräulein Max answered.

But I saw that the shaft had gone home. She fidgeted on her seat. And I persisted. "Still, if she does?" I said. "What then?"

"She will not!" she answered. "She must not!"

"By Heaven!" I cried, "you are on his side!"

She blinked at me with her short-sighted eyes. "And why not?" she said slowly. "On whose side should I be? My Lord Waldgrave's? He never gives me a word, and seldom recognises my existence. On yours? If you want help, go to the black-eyed puling girl you have brought in, who is always creeping and crawling round us, and would oust me if she and you could manage it and she had the breeding. Chut! don't talk to me," Fräulein Max continued maliciously, the colour rising to her pale cheeks. "I wonder that you dare to come to me with such proposals! Is my lady to be ruled by her servants? Has she no judgment of her own? Why, you fool, I have but to tell her, and you are disgraced!"

"As you please, Fräulein," I said sullenly, stung to anger by one part of her harangue. "But as to Marie Wort——"

"Marie Wort?" she cried, catching me up and mocking my tone. "Who said anything about her, I should like to know? Though for my part, had I my way, the popish chit should be whipped!"

"Fräulein!" I cried.

She laughed bitterly. "Oh, you are fools, you men!" she said. "But I have made you angry, and that is enough. Go! Yes, go. I have supped on folly. Go, before your mistress comes in; or I must out with all, and lose a power over you."

I went sullenly. While we had been talking the room had been growing dark. Then it had grown light again with a smoky, dancing glare that played fantastically on the walls and seemed to rise and sink with the murmur of applause outside. They had brought torches made of pine-knots that my lady might see the longer, and in the yellow circle of light which these shed, the mountebanks, monstrosly dressed and casting weird shadows, were wrestling and leaping and writhing. The light reached, but fitfully and by flashes, the log on which my lady sat enthroned; with General Tzerclas and the Waldgrave at her side. Still farther away the crowd surged and laughed and gibed in the darkness.

I looked at my lady and found one look enough. I read the utter hopelessness of the attempt I had just made. She was enjoying herself. Fear was not natural

to her, and she saw nothing to fear either in the man beside her or the crowd beyond. Suspicion was no part of her character, and she saw nothing to suspect. Had I won Fräulein Max over to my side, as I felt sure the general had bought her to his, I should equally have had my trouble for my pains, and no more.

My only hope lay in the Waldgrave. He alone, could he once warm into flower the love that hung trembling in the bud, might move her as I would have her moved. But, then, the time? Every hour we remained where we were, every day that rose and found us in the camp, rendered retreat more difficult, the general's plans more definite. He might not yet have made up his mind; he might not yet have hardened his heart to the point of employing force; *his* passion might be still in the bud, his ambition unshaped. But how long dared I give him?

Assured that here lay the stress, I watched the young lord's progress with an anxiety scarcely less than his own. And the longer I watched the higher rose my hopes. It seemed to me that he went steadily forward in favour, while the general stood still. More than once during the next two days the latter showed himself irritable or capricious. The iron hand began to push through the silken glove. And though, on every one of these occasions, Tzerclas covered his mistake with the dexterity of a man of the world, and my lady's eyes

could scarcely be said to be opened, a little coolness resulted, of which the Waldgrave had the benefit.

He, on his part, seemed imperturbable. Love had to all appearance changed his nature. A dozen times in the two days the impulse to fly at his rival's throat must have been strong upon him, yet through all he remained calm, pleasant, and courteous, and carried an old head on young shoulders.

I wondered at last why he did not speak, for I marked the cloud on the general's brow growing darker and darker, and I found the forced inaction and suspense intolerable. Then I gathered, I cannot say why, that the Waldgrave would not speak until after the great banquet to which the general had bidden my lady. It had been deferred a day or two, but on the third day after the shooting-match it took place.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GENERAL'S BANQUET.

I SUPPOSE it was not love only that enabled the Waldgrave to carry himself so prudently at this time; but with it a sense of the peril in which we all stood. He was so far from betraying this, however, that no one could have worn an air more gallant or seemed in every way more free from care. General Tzerclas had supplied

us with a couple of tailors, and there were rich stuffs to be bought in the camp; and the young lord did not neglect these opportunities. When he came on the morning of the great day to attend my lady to the banquet, he wore a suit of dark-blue velvet with a falling collar of white lace, and sash and points of lighter blue—the latter setting off his fair complexion to advantage. His hair, which had grown somewhat, flowed from under a broad-leafed hat decked with an ostrich feather, and he wore golden spurs, and high boots with the tops turned down. As he caracoled up and down before the house, with the sun shining on his fair head, he looked to my eyes as beautiful as Apollo. What the women thought of him I do not know; but I saw my lady gazing at him from a window when his back was turned, and then, again, when he looked towards the house, she was gone. And I thought I knew what that meant.

She wore, herself, a grey riding-coat with a little silver braid about it, and a silver belt; and we all made what show we could; so that when we started to the general's quarters we were something to look at. The camp itself nothing could cleanse, but the village had been swept and the street watered. Pennons and cornets waved here and there in the sunshine, and green boughs garnished the fronts of the houses. Two tall poles, painted after the Venetian fashion and hung

with streamers, stood before the general's quarters, the windows of which were almost hidden by a large trophy formed of glittering pikes and flags of many colours. The road here was strewn with green rushes, and opposite the house were ranked twelve trumpeters, who proclaimed my lady's arrival with a blare which shook the village.

On either side of the door a guard of honour was drawn up. I was not disposed to admire anything much, but it must be confessed that the sun shining on pike and corselet and steel cap, and on all the gay and gaudy colours and green leaves, produced a lively and striking effect. The moment my lady's horse stopped, four officers stepped from the doorway and stood at attention; after whom the general himself appeared bareheaded, and held my lady's stirrup while she dismounted. The Waldgrave performed a like service for Fräulein Anna, and I and Jacob for Marie Wort and the women.

Our host first conducted my lady into a withdrawing-room, where were only Count Waska and three colonels. This room, which was small, was fitted with a rich carpet and chairs covered with Spanish leather, as good as any my lady had in the castle at Heritzburg; and the walls were hidden behind Cordovan hangings. Here among other things were a large cage of larks and a strange, misshapen dwarf that stood

hardly as high as my waist-belt, but was rumoured to be forty years old. He said several witty things to my lady, and one or two that I fancy the general had taught him, for they brought the blood to her cheeks. On a table stood another very rare and curious thing—a gold or silver-gilt fountain that threw up distilled waters, and continually cooled and sweetened the air. There were besides, gold cups and plates and jewelled arms and Venice glass, which fairly dazzled me; so that as I stood at the door with Jacob and the two maids I wondered at the richness and splendour of everything, and could not get out of my head either the squalor of the hot, seething camp without, or the poverty of the country round, which the army had eaten as bare as my hand.

After a short interval spent in listening to the dwarf's quips and cranks, General Tzerclas conducted my lady with much ceremony to the next room, where the banquet was laid. The floor of this larger room was strewn with scented rushes, the walls being adorned with trophies of arms and heads of deer and wolves, peering from ambushes of green leaves. At the upper end, where was the private door of entrance, was a dais table laid for eight persons; below were tables for forty or more. On the dais the general sat in the middle, having my lady on the right, and next to her Count Waska; on his left he had the Waldgrave, and beyond

him Fräulein Anna. The two women stood behind my lady, holding her fan and vinaigrette. At the lower end of the room the general's band, placed in a kind of cage, played soft airs, while between the courses a gipsy girl danced very prettily, and a juggler diverted the company with his tricks.

As for the diversity of meats and fishes, and especially of birds, which was set on, it surprised me beyond measure; nor can I understand whence, in the wasted condition of the country, it was procured. For wines, Burgundy, Frontignac, and Tokay were served at the high table, and Rhine wines below. The courses continued to succeed one another for nearly three hours, but such was the skill of the musicians that the time seemed short. One man in particular won my lady's approbation. He played on a new instrument, framed somewhat like a viol, but smaller and more roundly framed. Though it had three strings only and was somewhat shrill, it had a wonderful power of touching the heart, arousing the memory and producing a sweet melancholy. The general would have had my lady accept it, and said that he could easily procure another from the Milanese; but she declined gracefully, on the ground that without the player it would be a dumb boon.

There was so much gaiety in all this—and decent observance too, for the general's presence kept good

order below—that I did not wonder that my lady's eyes sparkled and betrayed the gratification she felt. All was for her, all in her honour. Even I, who looked at the scene through green glasses and could not hear a word the general said without striving to place some ill construction on it—even I felt myself somewhat carried away, when the first toast, that of the Emperor, was given in the midst of cheering, partly serious, partly ironical. It was followed by that of the Elector of Saxony. The King of Sweden came next, and was received in an equally equivocal manner. Not so, however, the fourth, which was given by General Tzerclas standing, with his plumed hat in his hand.

“All in Tokay!” he cried in his deep voice. “The most noble and high-born, the Countess Rotha of Heritzburg, who honours us with her presence! Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!”

And draining his goblet, which was of green Nuremberg glass, and of no mean value, he dashed it to the floor, an example which was immediately followed by all present, so that the crash of glass and clang of sword-hilts filled the room with high-pitched sounds that seemed to intoxicate the ear.

My lady rose and bowed thrice, with her cheek crimson and her eyes soft. Then she turned to retire, while all remained standing. The general accompanied her as far as the door of the withdrawing-room, the

Waldgrave following with Fräulein Anna, while the dwarf marched side by side with me, keeping step with an absurd gravity which filled the room with laughter. On the threshold the general and his companions left us with low bows; but when they had gone Tzerclas came back to say a word in my ear.

"See to the other door," he muttered, flashing a grim look at me. "There may be deep drinking. If any offer so much as a word of rudeness here, he shall hang, drunk or sober. Have a care, therefore, that no one has the chance."

Then my heart sank, for I knew, hearing his tone and seeing his face, as he said that, that Fräulein Anna was right. He loved my mistress. He loved her! I went away to my place by the door, feeling as if he had struck me in the face. For if she loved him in return that were bad enough. And if she did not, what then, seeing that we were in his power?

Certainly he had omitted nothing on this occasion that might charm her. I thought that the feast was over now; but in the withdrawing-room a fresh collation of dainty sweets and syrups awaited my lady, with a great gold bowl of rose-water. The man who had played on the Italian viol brought it in too, that she might see and examine it more closely. From my post at the door, I saw Fräulein Anna flitting about, bringing her short-sighted eyes down to everything, thrusting her

face into the rose-water, and peering at the weapons and stuffs as if she would eat them. All the while, too, I could hear her prattling, ceaseless praise of everything—the general's taste, the general's wealth, his generosity, his skill in Latin, his love for Cæsar—the fat book I had seen him studying by the fire—above all, his appreciation of Voetius, of whom I shrewdly believe he had never heard before.

My lady sat almost silent under the steady shower of words, listening and thinking, and now and then touching the strings of the viol which lay forgotten on her lap. Perhaps she was dreaming of her two admirers, perhaps only giving ear to the growing tumult in the room we had left, where the revellers were still at their wine. By-and-by we heard them break into song, and then in thunder the chorus came rolling out—

“Hoch! Who rides with old Pappenheim knee to knee
The sword is his title, the world is his fee!
He knows nor Monarch, nor Sire, nor clime
Who follows the banner of bold Pappenheim!”

My lady's lip curled. “Is there no one on our side they can sing?” she muttered, tapping the viol impatiently with her fingers. “Have we no heroes? Has Count Bernard never headed a charge or won a fight? Pappenheim? I am tired of the man.”

The note jarred on her; as it had on me when I first heard these men, paid by the north, singing the

praises of the great southern raider. But a moment later she turned her head to hear better, and her face grew thoughtful. A great shout of "Waska! Waska!" rang above the jingling of glasses and snatches of song; and then, "The Waldgrave! The Waldgrave!" This time the cry was less boisterous, the voices were fewer.

"What is it?" my lady said, turning to me, a note of anxiety in her voice.

I was unable to tell her and I listened. By-and-by a roar of laughter made itself heard, and this was followed by a cry of "Waska!" as before. And then, "The Thuringian Code! The Thuringian Code! It is his turn!"

"They are drinking, your excellency," I said reluctantly. "It is a drinking match, I think!"

She rose with a grand gesture, and set the little viol back on the table. "I am going," she said, almost fiercely, "Let the horses be called."

Fräulein Max looked scared, but my lady's face forbade argument or reply; and for my part I was not a whit unwilling. I turned and gave the order to Jacob. While he was away the Countess remained standing, tapping the floor with her foot.

"On this day—on this day they might have abstained!" she muttered wrathfully, as the chorus of riot and laughter grew each moment louder and wilder.

I thought so too; I was glad besides of anything

which might work a breach between her and the general. But I little knew what was going to happen. It came upon us while we waited, with no more warning than I have described. The door by which we had left the banqueting chamber flew suddenly open, and three men, borne in on a wave of cheering and uproar, staggered in upon us, the leader reeling under the blows which his applauding followers rained upon his shoulders.

“There! Said I not so?” he cried thickly, lurching to one side to escape them, and almost falling. “Where ish your Waska. Your Waska now I’d like to know! Waska is great, but I am—greater—greater, you see. I can shoot, drink, fight, and make love better than any man here! Eh! Who shays I can’t? Eh? Itsh the Countesh! My cousin the Countesh! Ah!”

It was the Waldgrave! And yet not the Waldgrave. This man’s face was pale and swollen and covered with perspiration. His eyes were heavy and sodden, and his hair strayed over them. His collar and his coat were open at the neck, and his sash and the front of his dress were stained and reeking with wine. His hands trembled, his legs reeled, his tongue was too large for his mouth. He smiled fatuously at us. Yet it *was* the Waldgrave—drunk!”

My lady’s face froze as she looked at him. She raised her hand, and the men behind him fell back

abashed and left him standing there, propping himself uncertainly against the wall.

"Well, your excellency," he stuttered with a hic-cough—the sudden silence surprised him—"you don't congratulatsh me! Waska is under table. Under table, I shay!"

My lady looked at him, her eyes blazing with scorn. But she said nothing; only her fingers opened and closed convulsively. I turned to see if Jacob had come back. He entered at that moment and General Tzerclas with him.

"Your excellency's horses are coming," the latter said in his usual tone. Then he saw the Waldgrave and the open door, and he started with surprise. "What is this?" he cried. His face was flushed and his eyes were bright. But he was sober.

The drunken man tried to straighten himself. "Ashk Waska!" he said. Alas! where were his good looks now? I regarded him with horror. I knew what he had done.

"The horses?" the general asked in a low tone.

My lady drew a deep breath, as a person recovering consciousness does, and turned slowly towards him. "Yes," she said, shuddering from head to foot, "if you please. I wish to go."

The young lord heard the horses come to the door, and staggered forward. "Yesh, letsh go. I'll go too,"

he stuttered with a foolish laugh. "Letsh all go. Except Waska! He is under the table. Letsh all go, I say! Eh? Whatsh thish?"

I pushed him back and held him against the wall while the general led my lady out. But, of the pity of it, the wrath, the disappointment that filled my breast as I did so! This was the end of my duel! This was the stay to which I had trusted! The Waldgrave's influence with my lady? It was gone—gone as if it had never been. A spider's web, a rope of sand, a straw were after this a stronger thing to depend upon, a more sure safeguard, a stouter holdfast for a man in peril!

* * * * *

He came to my lady next morning about two hours after sunrise, when the dew was still on the grass and the birds—such as had lost their first broods or were mating late—were in full song. The camp was still sleeping off its debauch, and the village street was bright and empty, with a dog here and there gnawing a bone, or sneaking round the corner of a building. My lady had gone out early to the fallen tree with her psalm book; and she was sitting there in the freshness of the morning, with her back to the house and the street, when his shadow fell across the page and she looked up and saw him.

She said "good morning" very coldly, and he for a

moment said nothing, but stood, sullenly making a hole in the dust with his toe and looking down at it. His face was pale—where it was not red with shame—and his eyes were heavy and dull; but otherwise the wine he had taken had left no mark on his vigorous youth.

My lady after speaking looked down at her book again, and he continued to stand before her like a whipped school-boy, stealing every now and then a furtive look at her. At length she looked up again.

“Do you want anything?” she said.

This time he returned her gaze, with his face on fire, trying to melt her. And I think that there were not many more unhappy men at that moment than he. His fancy, liking, love were centred in the woman before him; in a mad freak he had outraged, insulted, estranged her. He did not know what to do, how to begin, what plea to put forward. He could for the moment only look, with shame and misery in his face.

It was a plea that would have melted many, but my lady only grew harder. “Did you hear me?” she said proudly. “Do you want anything?”

“You know!” he cried impetuously, and his voice broke out fiercely and seemed to beat against her impassiveness as a bird against the bars of its cage. “I was a beast last night. But, oh, Rotha, forgive me.”

“I think that we had better not talk about it,” my

lady answered him stonily. "It is past, and we need not quarrel over it. I shall be wiser next time," she added. "That is all."

"Wiser?" he muttered.

"Yes; wiser than to trust myself to your protection," she answered ruthlessly.

He shrank back as if she had struck him, and for a moment pain and rage brought the blood surging to his cheeks. He even took a step as if to leave her; but when love and pride struggle in a young man, love commonly has it, and he turned again and stood hesitating; the picture of misery.

"Is that all you will say to me?" he muttered, his voice unsteady.

My lady moved her feet uneasily. Then she shut her book, and looked round as if she would have willingly escaped. But she was not stone; and when at length she turned to him, her face was changed.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked gently.

"That some day you will forgive me?" he answered.

"I forgive you now," she rejoined firmly. "But I cannot forget. I do not think I ever can," she went on. "Last night I was in your charge among strangers. If danger had arisen, whose arm was to shield me, if not yours? If any had insulted me, to whom was I to look, if not to you? Yes, you may well hide your face," my

lady continued, waxing bitter, despite herself. "I am not at Heritzburg now, and you should have remembered that. I am here with scanty protection, with few means to exact respect, a refugee, if you like, a mark for scandal, and your kinswoman. And you? for shame, Rupert!"

He fell on his knees and seized her hand. "You are killing me!" he cried in a choking voice, his face pale, his breath coming quickly. "For I love you, Rotha, I love you! And every word of reproach you utter is death to me."

"Hush, Rupert!" she said quickly. And she tried to withdraw her hand. He had taken her by surprise.

But he was not to be silenced; and he kept her hand, though he rose to his feet. "It is true," he answered. "I have waited long enough. I must speak now, or it may be too late. I tell you, I love you!"

The Countess's face was crimson, her brow dark with vexation. "Hush!" she said again, and more imperatively. "I have heard enough. It is useless."

"You have not heard me!" he answered. "Don't say so until you have heard me." And he sat down suddenly on the tree beside her, and looked into her face with pleading eyes. "You are letting last night weigh against me," he went on. "If that be all, I will never drink more than three cups of wine at a time as long as I live. I swear it."

She shook her head rather sadly. "That is not all, Rupert," she said.

"Then what will you have?" he answered eagerly. He saw the change in her, and his eyes began to burn with hope as he looked. Her milder tone, her down-cast head, her altered aspect, all encouraged him. "I love you, Rotha!" he cried in rapture, raising her hand to his lips. "What more will you have? Tell me. All I have, and all I ever shall have—and I am young and may do great things—are yours. I have been riding behind you day by day, until I know every turn of your head, and every note of your voice. I know you step when you walk, and the rustle of your skirt among a hundred! And there is no other woman in the world for me! What if I am the youngest cadet of my house?" he continued, leaning toward her; "this war will last many a year yet, and I will carve you a second county with my sword. Wallenstein did. Who was he? A simple gentleman. Now he is Duke of Friedland. And that Englishman who married a king's sister? They succeeded, why should not I? Only give me your love, Rotha! Trust me; trust me once more and always, and I will not fail you."

He tried to draw her nearer to him, but the Countess shook her head, and looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Poor boy," she said slowly. "Poor boy! I am sorry, but it cannot be. It can never be."

"Why?" he cried, starting as if she had stung him.

"Because I do not love you," she said.

He dropped her hand and sat glaring at her. "You are thinking of last night!" he muttered.

She shook her head. "I am not," she said simply. "I suppose that if I loved you, that and worse would go for nothing. But I do not."

Her calmness, her even tone went to his heart and chilled it. He winced, and uttering a low cry turned from her and hid his face in his hands.

"Why not?" he said thickly, after an interval. "Why can you not love me?"

"Why does the swallow nest here and not there?" the Countess answered gently. "I do not know. Why did my father love a foreigner and not one of his own people? I do not know. Neither do I know why I do not love you. Unless," she added, with suddenly rising colour, "it is that you are young, younger than I am; and a woman turns naturally to one older than herself."

Her words seemed to point so surely to General Tzerclas that the young man ground his teeth together. But he had not spirit to turn and reproach her then; and after remaining silent for some minutes, he rose.

"Good-bye," he said in a broken voice. And he lifted her hands to his lips and kissed it.

The Countess started. The words, the action im-

pressed her disagreeably. "You are not going—away I mean?" she said.

"No," he answered slowly. "But things are—changed. When we meet again it will be as——"

"Friends!" she cried impulsively, her voice tender almost to yearning. "Say it shall be so, Rupert. Let it be so always. You will not leave me alone here?"

"No," he said simply, and with dignity. "I shall not."

Then he went away, quite quietly; and if the beginning of the interview had shown him to small advantage, the same could not be said of the end. He went down the street and through the camp with his head on his breast and a mist before his eyes. The light was gone out of the sunshine, the greenness from the trees. The day was grey and dreary and miserable. The blight was on all he saw. And it is so with men. When they cannot have that which seems to them the best and fairest and most desirable thing in the world, nothing is good or pleasant or to be desired any longer.

CHAPTER XVII.

STALHANSKE'S FINNS.

It was my ill luck, on that day which began so inauspiciously, to see two shadows: one on a man's face, the Waldgrave's, and of that I need say no more; the other, the shadow of a man's body, an odd, sinister outline, crooked and strange and tremulous, that I came upon in a remote corner of the camp, to which I had wandered in my perplexity; a place where a few stunted trees ran down a steep bank to the river. I had never been to this place before, and, after a glance which showed me that it was the foul sink and rubbish-bed of the camp, I was turning moodily away, when first this shadow and then the body which cast it caught my eye. The latter hung from the branch of an old gnarled thorn, the feet a few inches from the ground. A shuddering kind of curiosity led me to go up and look at the dead man's face, which was doubled up on his breast; and then the desire to test the nerves, which is common to most men, induced me to stand staring at him.

The time was two hours after noon, and there were few persons moving. The camp was half asleep. Heat, and flies, and dust were everywhere—and this grue-

some thing! The body was stripped, and the features were swollen and disfigured, but, after a moment's thought, I recognized them, and saw that I had before me the poor wretch who had appealed to my lady's compassion after the shooting-match, and to whom the general had opened his hand so freely. The grim remarks I had then heard on his bounty recurred now, and set me shuddering. If any doubt still remained in my mind, it was dissipated a moment later by a placard which had once hung round the dead man's neck, but now lay in the dust at his feet. I turned it over. Chalked on it in large letters were the words "Beggars, beware!"

I felt at first, on making the discovery, only horror and indignation, and a violent loathing of the camp and all in it. These feelings by-and-by passed, however, and left me free to consider how the deed touched us. Could I prove it? Could I bring it home to the general to my lady's satisfaction, beyond denial or escape, and so open her eyes? And if I could, would it be wise to do so? Would it be wise to rouse his anger while she remained in the camp and in General Tzerclas' power? I might only hasten the catastrophe.

I found this a hard nut to crack, and I was still puzzling over it, with my eyes on the senseless form which was already so far out of my thoughts, when a

heavy hand fell on my shoulder and a harsh voice grated on my ear.

"Well, Master Steward, a penny for your thoughts! They should be worth having, to judge by the way you rub your chin."

I started and looked round. The speaker was Captain Ludwig, who, with two of his fellows, had come up behind me while I mused. Something in his tone rather than his words—a note of menace—warned me to be careful; while the glum looks of his companions, as they glanced from me to the dead man, added point to the hint, and filled my mind with a sudden sense of danger. I had learned more than I had been intended to learn; I had found out something I had not been intended to find out. The very quietness and sunshine and the solitude of the place added horror to the moment. It was all I could do to hide my discomfiture and face them without flinching.

"My thoughts?" I said, forcing a grin. "They were not very difficult to guess. A sharp shrift, and a short rope? What else should a man think here?"

"Ay!" Ludwig said, watching me closely with his eyes half closed and his lips parted.

He would say no more, and I was forced to go on. "It is not the first time I have seen a man dancing on nothing!" I said recklessly; "but it gave me a turn."

He kicked the placard. "You are a scholar," he said. "What is this?"

My face grew hot. I dared not deny my learning, for I did not know how much he knew; but, for the nonce, I wished heartily that I had never been taught to read.

"That?" I said, affecting a jovial tone to cover my momentary hesitation. "A seasonable warning. They are as thick here as nuts in autumn. We could spare a few more, for the matter of that."

"Ay, but this one?" he retorted, coolly tapping the dead man with a little stick he carried, and then turning to look me in the face. "You have seen him before."

I made a great show of staring at the body; but I suppose I played my part ill, for before I could speak Ludwig broke in with a brutal laugh.

"Chut, man!" he said, with a sneer of contempt; "you know him; I see you do. And knew him all along. Well, if fools will poke their noses into things that do not concern them, it is not my affair. I must trouble you for your company awhile."

"Whither?" I said, setting my teeth together and frowning at him.

"To my master," he replied, with a curt nod. "Don't say you won't," he continued with meaning, "for he is not one to be denied."

I looked from one to another of the three men, and for a moment the desperate clinging to liberty, which makes even the craven bold, set my hands tingling and sent the blood surging to my head. But reason spoke in time. I saw that the contest was too unequal, the advantage of a few minutes' freedom too trivial, since the general must sooner or later lay his hand on me; and I crushed down the impulse to resist.

"What scares you, comrades?" I said, laughing savagely. They had recoiled a foot. "Do you see a ghost or a Swede, that you look so pale? Your general wants me? Then let him have me. Lead on! I won't run away, I warrant you."

Ludwig nodded as he placed himself by my side. "That is the right way to take it," he said. "I thought that you might be going to be a fool, comrade."

"Like our friend there," I said dryly, pointing to the senseless form we were leaving. "He made a fuss, I suppose?"

Captain Ludwig shrugged his shoulders. "No," he answered, "not he so much; but his wife. Donner! I think I hear her screams now. And she cursed us! Ah!"

I shuddered, and after that was silent. But more than once before we reached the general's quarters the frantic desire to escape seized me, and had to be repressed. I felt that this was the beginning of the end

the first disclosure of the strong grasp which held us all helpless. I thought of my lady, I thought of Marie Wort, and I could have shrieked like a woman; for I was powerless, like a woman—gripped in a hand I could not resist.

The camp grilling and festering in the sunshine—how I hated it! It seemed an age I had lived in its dusty brightness, an age of vague fears and anxieties. I passed through it now in a feverish dream until an exclamation, uttered by my companion as we turned into the village street, aroused me. The street was full of loiterers standing about in groups, and staring at a little band of horsemen who sat motionless in their saddles in front of the general's quarters. For a moment I took them to be the general's staff. Then I saw that they were dressed all alike, that their broad, ruddy faces were alike, that they held themselves with the same unbending precision, and seemed, in a word, to be ten copies of one stalwart man. Near them a servant on foot was leading two horses up and down, and they and he had the air of being on show.

Captain Ludwig, holding me fast by the arm, stopped at the first group of starers we came to. "Who are these?" he asked gruffly.

The man he addressed turned round, eager to impart his knowledge. "Finns!" he said; "from headquarters—Stalhanske's Finns. No less, captain."

My companion whistled. "What are they doing here?" he asked.

The other shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "Their leader is with the general. What do you think of them, Master Ludwig?"

But Ludwig only grunted, and looked with disparaging eyes at the motionless riders, whose air betrayed a certain consciousness of their fame and the notice which they were exciting. From steel cap to spurred boot, they showed all metal and leather. Nothing gay, nothing gaudy; not a chain or a sash differentiated one from another. Grim, stern, and silent, they stared before them. Had no one named the King of Sweden's great regiment, I had known that I was looking no longer on brigands, but on soldiers—on part of the iron line that at Breitenfeld broke the long repute of years, and swept Pappenheim from the hillside like chaff before the storm!

After hesitating a moment, Ludwig went forward a few paces, as if to enter the house, taking me with him. Then he paused. At the same instant the man who was leading the two horses up and down, turned. His eye lit on me, and I saw an extraordinary change come over the fellow's face. He stopped short and, pulling up his horses, stared at me. It seemed to me, too, that I had seen him before; but while I was trying to remember where, the door of the general's quarters opened. Two or three men who were loitering outside

it, stepped quickly aside, and a tall, stalwart man came out, followed by General Tzerclas himself.

I looked at the foremost, and in a twinkling recognized him. It was Van Werder. But an extraordinary change had come over the traveller. He was still plainly dressed, in a buff coat, with untanned boots, a leather sword-belt, and a grey hat with a red feather; and in all of these there was nothing to catch the eye. But his air and manner as he spoke to his companion were no longer those of an inferior, while his stern eye, as it travelled over the crowd in the street, expressed cold and steady contempt.

As the servant brought up his horse, he spoke to his companion. "You are sure that you can do it—with these?" he said, flicking his riding-whip towards the silent throng.

"You may consider it done," the general answered rather grimly.

"Good! I am glad. Well, man, what is it?"

He spoke the last words to his servant. The man pointed to me and said something. Von Werder looked at me. In a moment every one looked at me. Then Von Werder swung himself into his saddle, and turned to General Tzerclas.

"That is the man, I am told," he said, pointing suddenly to me with his whip.

"He is at your service," the general answered with a shrug of indifference.

In an instant Von Werder's horse was at my side. "A word with you, my man," he said sharply. "Come with me."

Ludwig had hold of my arm still. He had not loosed me, and at this he interposed. "My lord," he cried to the general, "this man—I have something to——"

"Silence, fool!" Tzerclas growled. "And stand aside, if you value your skin!"

Ludwig let me go, and immediately, as if an angel had descended to speak for me, the crowd parted, and I was free—free and walking away down the street by the side of the stranger, who continued to look at me from time to time, but still kept silence. When we had gone in this fashion a couple of hundred paces or more, and were clear of the crowd, he seemed no longer able to control himself, though he looked like a man apt at self-command. He waved his escort back and reined in his horse.

"You are the man to whom I talked the other night," he said, fixing me with his eyes—"the Countess of Heritzburg's steward?"

I replied that I was. His face as he looked down at me, with his back to his following, betrayed so much agitation that I wondered more and more. Was he

going to save us? Could he save us? Who was he? What did it all mean? Then his next question scattered all these thoughts and doubled my surprise.

"You had a chain stolen from you the night I lay in your camp?" he said harshly.

I stared at him with my mouth open. "A chain?" I stammered. "A chain, my lord?"

"Ay, fool, a chain!" he replied, his eyes glaring, his cheeks swelling with impatience. "A gold chain—with links like walnuts."

"That is true," I said stupidly. "I had. But——"

"Where did you get it?"

I looked away. To answer was easy; to refrain from answering, with his eye upon me, hard. But I thought of Marie Wort. I did not know how the chain had come into her hands, and I asked him a question in return.

"Have you the chain?" I said.

"I have!" he snarled. And then in a sudden outburst of wrath he cried, "Listen, fool! And then perhaps you will answer more quickly. I am Hugo of Leuchtenstein, Governor of Cassel and Marburg, and President of the Landgrave's Council. The chain was mine and came back to me. The rogue who stole it from you, and joined himself to my company, blabbed of it, and where he got it. He let my men see it. He would not give it up, and they killed him. Will that

satisfy you?" he continued, his moustachios bristling with rage. "Then tell me all—all, man, or it will be the worse for you! My time is precious, and I cannot stay!"

I uncovered myself. "Your excellency," I stammered, "the chain was entrusted to me by a—a woman."

"A woman?" he exclaimed, his eyes lightening. "Man, you are wringing my heart. A woman with a child?"

I nodded.

"A child three years old?"

"About that, your excellency," I answered. On which, to my astonishment, he covered his face with both his hands, and I saw the strong man's frame heave with ill-suppressed emotion. "My God, I thank thee!" I heard him whisper; and if ever words came from the heart, those did. It was a minute or more before he dared to uncover his face, and then his eyes were moist and his features worked with emotion.

"You shall be rewarded!" he said unsteadily. "Do not fear. And now take me to him—to her."

I was in a maze of astonishment, but I had sense enough to understand the order. We had halted scarcely more than a hundred yards from my lady's quarters, and I led the way thither, comprehending little more than that something advantageous had happened to us. At the door he sprang from his horse, and taking me

by the arm, as if he were afraid to suffer me out of his reach, he entered, pushing me before him.

The principal room was empty, and I judged my lady was out. I cried "Marie! Marie!" softly, and then he and I stood listening. The sunshine poured in through the windows; the house was still with the stillness of afternoon. A bird in a cage in the corner pecked at the bars. Outside the bits jingled, and a horse pawed the road impatiently.

"Marie!" I cried. "Marie!"

She came in suddenly through a door which led to the back of the house, and I stepped forward to speak to her. But the moment I saw her clearly, the words died on my lips. The pallor of her face, the disorder of her hair struck me dumb. I forgot our business, my companion, all. "What is it?" was all I could say. "What is the matter?"

"The child!" she cried, her dark eyes wild with anxiety and terror. "The child! It is lost! It is lost and gone. I cannot find it!"

"The child? Gone?" I answered, my voice rising almost to a shout, in my surprise. "It is missing? Now?"

"I cannot find it," she answered monotonously. "I left it for a moment at the back there. It was playing on the grass. Now it is gone."

I looked at Count Leuchtenstein. He was staring

at the girl, listening and watching, his brow contracted, his face pale. But I suppose this sudden alarm, this momentary disappearance did not affect him, from whom the child had been so long absent, as it affected us; for his first words referred to the past.

"This child, woman?" he said in his deep voice, which shook despite all his efforts. "When you found it, it had a chain round its neck?"

Marie, on the other hand, was so wrapped up in her sudden loss that she answered him almost mechanically, listening the while. "Yes," she said, "it had."

"Where did you find it, then—the child?" he asked eagerly.

"In the forest by Vach," she replied, in the same indifferent tone.

"Was it alone?" he continued.

"It was with a dead woman," she answered. She was listening still, with a strained face—listening for the pattering of the little feet, the shrill music of the piping voice. Only half of her mind was with us. Her hands opened and closed continually with anxiety; she held her head on one side, her ear to the door. When the Count went to put another question, she turned upon him so fiercely, I hardly knew her. "Hush!" she said, "will you? They are here, but they have not found him. They have not found him!"

And she was right; though we, whose ears were not

sharpened by love, did not discern this until two men, who had been left at home with her, and who had been out to search, came in empty-handed and with grave looks. They had hunted on all sides and found no trace of the child, and, certain that it could not have strayed far itself, they pronounced positively that it had been kidnapped.

Marie at that burst into weeping so pitiful, that I was glad to send the men out, bidding them make a larger circuit and inquire in the camp. When they were gone, I turned to Count Leuchtenstein to see how he took it. I found him leaning against the wall, his face grave, dark, and thoughtful.

"There seems a fatality in this!" he muttered, meeting my eyes, but speaking to himself. "That it should be lost again—at this moment! Yet, God's will be done. He who sent the chain to my hands can still take care of the child."

He paused a moment in deep thought, and then, advancing to Marie Wort, who had thrown herself into a chair and was sobbing passionately with her face on the table, he touched her on the shoulder.

"Good girl!" he said kindly. "Good girl! But doubtless the child is safe. Before night it will be found."

She sprang up and faced him, her cheeks flaming

with anger. I suppose the questions he had put to her had made no distinct impression on her mind.

"Oh," she cried, in the voice of a shrew, "how you prate! By night it will be found, will it? How do you know? But the child is nothing to you—nothing!"

"Girl," he said solemnly, yet gently, "the child is my child—my only child, and the hope of my house."

She looked at him wildly. "Who are you, then?" she said, her voice sinking almost to a whisper.

"I am his father," he answered; when I looked to hear him state his name and titles. "And as his father, I thank and bless you for all that you have done for him."

"His mother?" she whispered, open-eyed with awe.

"His mother is dead. She died three years ago," he answered gravely. "And now tell me your name, for I must go."

"You must go!" she exclaimed. "You will go—you can go—and your child lost and wandering?"

"Yes," he replied, with a dignity which silenced her, "I can, for I have other and greater interests to guard than those of my house, and I dare not be negligent. He may be found to-morrow, but what I have to do to-day cannot be done to-morrow. See, take that," he continued more gently, laying a heavy purse on the table before her. "It is for you, for your own use—for your dowry, if you have a lover. And

remember always that, in the house of Hugo of Leuchtenstein, at Cassel, or Marburg, or at the Schloss by Leuchtenstein, you will find a home and shelter, and stout friends whenever you need them. Now give me your name."

She stared at him dumbfounded and was silent. I told him Marie Wort of Munich, at present in attendance on the Countess of Heritzburg; and he set it down in his tablets.

"Good," he said. And then in his stern, grave fashion he turned to me. "Master Steward," he said, in a measured tone which nevertheless stirred my blood, "are you an ambitious man? If so, search for my child, and bring him to Cassel or Marburg, or my house, and I will fulfil your ambition. Would you have a command, I will see to it; or a farm, it shall be yours. You can do for me, my friend," he continued strenuously, laying his hand on my arm, "what in this stress of war and statecraft I cannot do for myself. I have a hundred at my call, but they are not here; and by to-night I must be ten leagues hence, by to-morrow night beyond the Main. Yet God, I believe," he went on, uncovering himself and speaking with reverent earnestness, "who brought me to this place, and permitted me to hear again of my son, will not let His purpose fail because He calls me elsewhere."

And he maintained this grave composure to the

last. A man more worthy of his high repute, not in Hesse only, but in the Swedish camp, at Dresden, and Vienna alike, I thought that I had never seen. Yet still under the mask I discerned the workings of a human heart. His eye, as he turned to go, wandered round the room; I knew that it was seeking some trace of his boy's presence. On the threshold he halted suddenly; I knew he was listening. But no sound rewarded him. He nodded sternly to me and went out.

I followed to hold his stirrup. The Finland riders, sitting upright in their saddles, looked as if they had not moved an eyelash in our absence. As I had left them so I found them. He gave a short, sharp word of command; a sudden jingling of bridles followed; the troop walked forward, broke into a trot, and in a twinkling disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust.

Then, and not till then, I remembered that I had not said a single word to him about my lady's position. His personality and the loss of the child had driven it for the time from my mind. Now it recurred to me, but it was too late, and after stamping up and down in vexation for a while, I turned and went into the house.

Marie Wort had fallen back into the old position at the table, and was sitting with her face on her arms, sobbing bitterly. I went up to her and saw the purse lying by her side.

"Come," I said, trying awkwardly to cheer her, "the child will be found, never fear. When my lady returns she will send to the general, and he will have it cried through the camp. It is sure to be found. And you have made a powerful friend."

But she took no heed of me. She continued to weep; and her sobs hurt me. She seemed so small and lonely and helpless that I had not the heart to leave her by herself in the house and go out into the sunshine to search. And so—I scarcely know how it came about—in a moment she was sobbing out her grief on my shoulder and I was whispering in her ear.

Of love? of our love? No. For to have spoken of that while she wept for the child, would have seemed to me no better than sacrilege. And, besides, I think that we took it for granted. For when her sobs presently ceased, and she lay quiet, listening, and I found her soft dark hair on my shoulder, I kissed it a hundred times; and still she lay silent, her cheek against my rough coat. Our eyes had spoken morning and evening, at dawn when we met, and at night when we parted; and now that this matter of the chain was settled, it seemed fitting that she should come to me for comfort—without words.

At length she drew herself away from me, her cheek dark and her eyes downcast. "Not now," she said, gently stopping me—for then I think I should have

spoken. "Will you please to go out and search? No, I will not grieve."

"But your purse!" I reminded her. She was leaving it on the table, and it was not safe there. "You should put it in a place of safety, Marie."

She took it up and very simply placed it in my hands. "He said it was for my—dowry," she whispered, blushing. And then she fled away shamefaced to her room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUDDEN EXPEDITION.

I DID not after that suffer the grass to grow under my feet. I went out, and with my own eyes searched the fields at the back, and every ditch and water-hole. I had the loss cried in the camp, my lady on her return offered a reward, we sent even to the nearer villages, we patrolled the roads, we omitted nothing that could by any chance avail us. Yet evening fell, and night, and found us still searching; and no nearer, as far as we could see, to success. The child was gone mysteriously. Left to play alone for two minutes in the stillness of the afternoon, he had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Baffled, we began to ask, while Marie sat pale and brooding in a corner, or now and again stole to the door to listen, who could have taken him and with what motive! There were men and women in the camp capable of anything. It seemed probable to some that these had stolen the child for the sake of his clothes. Others suggested witchcraft. But in my own mind, I leaned to neither of these theories. I suspected, though I dared not utter the thought, that the general had done it. Without knowing how much of the story Count

Hugo had confided to him, I took it as certain that the father had said enough to apprise him of the boy's value. And this being so, what more probable than that the general, whom I was prepared to credit with any atrocity, should take instant steps to possess himself of the child?

My lady said and did all that was kind on the occasion. And for a few hours it occupied all our thoughts. At the end of that time, however, about sunset, General Tzerclas rode to the door, and with him, to my surprise, the Waldgrave. They would see her, and detained her so long that when she sent for me on their departure, I was sore on Marie's account, and inclined to blame her as indifferent to our loss. But a single glance at her face put another colour on the matter. I saw that something had occurred to excite and disturb her.

"Martin," she said earnestly, "I am going to employ you on an errand of importance. Listen to me and do not interrupt me. General Tzerclas starts to-morrow with the larger part of his forces to intercept one of Wallenstein's convoys, which is expected to pass twelve leagues to the south of this. There will be sharp fighting, I am told, and my cousin, the Waldgrave Rupert, is going. He is not at present—I mean, I am afraid he may do something rash. He is young," my lady continued with dignity and a heightened colour, "and I wish he would stay here. But he will not."

I guessed at once that this affair of the convoy was the business which had brought Count Hugo to the camp. And I was beginning to consider what advantage we might make of it, and whether the general's absence might not afford us both a pretext for departure and the opportunity, when my lady's next words dispelled my visions.

"I want you," she said slowly, "to go with him. He has a high opinion of you, and will listen to you."

"The general?" I cried in amazement.

"Who spoke of him?" she exclaimed angrily. "I said the Waldgrave Rupert. I wish you to go with him to see that he does not run any—any unnecessary risk."

I coughed dryly, and stood silent.

"Well?" my lady said with a frown. "Do you understand?"

"I understand, my lady," I answered firmly; "but I cannot go."

"*You cannot go!* when I send you!" she murmured, unable, I think, to believe her ears. "Why not, sirrah? Why not, if you please?"

"Because my first duty is to your excellency," I stammered. "And as long as you are here, I dare not—and will not leave you!"

"As long as I am here!" she retorted, red with anger and surprise. "You have still that maggot in your head, then? By my soul, Master Martin, if we

were at home I would find means to drive it out! But I know what it is! What you really want is to stay by the side of that puling girl! Oh, I am not blind," my lady continued viciously, seeing that she had found at last the way to hurt me. "I know what has been going on."

"But Count Leuchtenstein———" I muttered.

"Don't bring him in!" my lady cried, in such a voice that I dared go no farther. "General Tzerclas has told me of him. I understand what is between them, and you do not. Presumptuous booby!" she continued, flashing at me a glance of scorn, which made me tremble. "But I will thwart you! I have a way to do it. Since you will not leave me, I will go myself. I will go, but Mistress Marie shall stay here till we return."

"If there is to be fighting, my lady?" I said humbly.

"Ah! So you have changed your note, have you!" she cried triumphantly. I had seldom seen her more moved. "If there is to be fighting"—she mocked my tone. "Well, there is to be, but I shall go. And now do you go, and have all ready for a start at daybreak, or it will be the worse for you! My woman will accompany me. Fräulein Anna will stay here with your—other mistress!"

She pointed to the door as she spoke, and once more charged me to be ready; and I went away dazed.

Everything seemed on a sudden to be turned upside down—the child lost, my lady offended, the Waldgrave desperate, the general in favour. I could not see which way my duty lay. I would fain have stayed in the camp a day to make farther search for the child, but I must go. I would gladly have got clear of the camp, but we were to travel in the general's company. As to leaving Marie, my lady wronged me. I knew of no special danger which threatened the girl, nor any reason why she should not be safe where she was. If the child were found she would be here to receive it.

On the other hand, there was my discovery of the beggar's fate, from the immediate consequences of which Count Hugo's arrival had saved me. This sudden expedition should favour me there; the general would have his hands full of other things, and Ludwig be hard put to it to gain his ear. I might now, if I pleased, discover the matter to my lady, and open her eyes. But I had no proof. Even if time permitted, and I could take the Countess to that part of the camp, I could not be sure that the body was still there. And to accuse General Tzerclas of such a thing without proof would be to court my own ruin.

While I was puzzling over this, I saw the Waldgrave outside, and, thinking to profit by his advice, I went to meet him. But I found him in a peculiar mood, talking, laughing, and breaking into snatches of song; and

all with a wildness and *abandon* that frightened while they puzzled me. He laughed at my doubts. Walking up and down, while his servants scoured his breast-piece and cleaned his harness by the light of a lantern, he persisted in talking of nothing but the expedition before us and the pleasure of striking a blow or two.

"We are rusting, man!" he cried feverishly, clapping me on the back. "You have the rust on you yet, Martin. But—

‘Clink, clink, clink!
Sword and stirrup and spur!
Ride, ride, ride,
Fast as feather or fur!’

To-morrow or the next day we will have it off."

"You have heard about the child, my lord," I said gravely, trying to bring him back to the present.

"I have heard that Von Werder, the dullest man at a board I ever met, turns out to be Hugo of Leuchtenstein, whom God preserve!" he answered recklessly. "And that your girl's brat of a brother turns out to be his brat! And no sooner is the father found than the son is lost; and that both have gone as mysteriously as they came. But Himmel! man, what's the odds when we are going to fight to-morrow! What compares with that? *Ça! ça!* steady and the point!"

I thought of Marie; and it seemed to me that there were other things in the world besides fighting. For

love makes a man both brave and a coward. But the argument would scarcely have been to the Waldgrave's mind, and, seeing that he would neither talk nor hear reason, I left him and went away to make my preparations.

But on the road next day I noticed that though every now and then he still flashed into the same wild merriment, he was as dull as he had been gay. Our party rode at the head of the column, that we might escape the dust and have the best of the road, the general and his principal officers accompanying us and leaving the guidance of the march to inferiors. Our force consisted of about six hundred horse and four hundred foot; and as we were to return to the camp, we took with us neither sutlers nor ordinary baggage, while camp followers were interdicted under pain of death. Still the amount of our impedimenta astonished me. Half a dozen sumpter horses were needed to carry the general's tent and equipage; his officers required a score more. The ammunition for the foot soldiers, who were sufficiently burdened with their heavy matchlocks, provided farther loads; and in fine, while supposed to be marching in light fighting order, we had something like a hundred pack-horses in our train. Then there were men to lead them, and cooks and pages and foot-boys and the general's band, and but that our way lay through woodland tracks and by-routes,

I verily believe that we should have had his coach and dwarf also.

The sight of all these men and horses in motion was so novel and exhilarating, and the morning air so brisk, that I soon recovered from my parting with Marie, and began to take a more cheerful view of the position. I came near to sympathising with my lady, whose pleasure and delight knew no bounds. The long lines of horsemen, winding through the wood, the trailing pikes and waving pennons, gratified her youthful fancy for war; while as our march lay through the forest, she was shocked by none of those traces of its ravages which had appalled us on first leaving Heritzburg. The general waited on her with the utmost attention, riding by her bridle-rein and talking with her by the hour together. Whenever I looked at them I noticed that her eye was bright and her colour high, and I guessed that he was unfolding the plan of ambition which I was sure he masked under a cold and reserved demeanour. Alas! I could think of nothing more likely to take my lady's fancy, no course more sure to enlist her sympathy and interest. But I was helpless; I could do nothing. And for the Waldgrave, if he still had any power he would not use it.

My lady gave him opportunities. Several times I saw her try to draw him into conversation, and whenever General Tzerclas left her for a while she turned to the

younger man and would have talked to him. But he seemed unable to respond. When he was not noisily gay, he rode like a mute. He seemed half sullen, half afraid; and she presently gave him up, but not before her efforts had caught Tzerclas' eye. The general had been called for some purpose to the rear of the column, and on his return found the two talking, my lady's attitude such that it was very evident she was the provocant. He did not try to resume his place, but fell in behind them; and riding so, almost, if not quite, within earshot, cast such ugly glances at them as more than confirmed me in the belief that in his own secret way he loved my mistress; and that after a more dangerous fashion than the Waldgrave.

That was late in the afternoon, and another hour brought us who marched at the head of the column to our camping-ground for the night. This lay in a rugged, wooded valley, not very commodious, but chosen because only one high ridge divided it from a second valley, through which the main road and the river had their course. Our instructions were that the convoy, which was bound for Wallenstein's army then marching on Nuremberg, would pass through this second valley some time the following day. But until the hour came for making the proper dispositions, all persons in our force were forbidden to mount the intervening ridge under pain of death. We had even to do without fires

lest the smoke should betray our presence. For this one night we lay under something like the strict discipline which I had expected to find prevailing in a military camp. The only fire that was permitted cooked the general's meal, which he shared with my lady and the Waldgrave and the principal officers.

Even so the order caused trouble. The pikemen and musketeers did not come in till an hour before midnight, when they trudged into camp dusty and footsore and murmuring at their leaders. When, in this state, they learned that fires were not to be lighted, disgust grew rapidly into open disobedience. On a sudden, in half a dozen quarters at once, flames flickered up, and the camp, dark before, became peopled in a moment with strange forms, whose eighteen-foot weapons and cumbrous headpieces flung long shadows across the valley.

We had lain down to rest, but at the sound of the altercation and the various cries of "Pikes! Pikes!" and "Mutiny!" which broke out, we came out of our lairs in the bracken to learn what was happening. Calling young Jacob and three or four of the Heritzburg men to my side, I ran to my lady to see that nothing befel her in the confusion. The noise had roused her, and we found her at the door of her tent looking out. The newly kindled fires, flaming and crackling on the sloping sides of the valley, lit up a strange scene of disorder

—of hurrying men and plunging horses, for the alarm had extended to the horse lines—and for a moment I thought that the mutiny might spread and cut the knot of our difficulties, or overwhelm us all in the same ruin.

I had scarcely conceived the thought, when the general passed near us on his way from his tent, whence he had just been called; and at the sight my new-born hopes vanished. He was bareheaded. He carried no arms, and had nothing in his hand but a riding-switch. But the stern, grim aspect of his face, in which was no mercy and no quailing, was worth a thousand pikes. The firelight shone on his pale, olive cheek and brooding eyes, as he went by us, not seeing us; and after that I did not doubt what would happen, although for a moment the tumult of oaths and cries seemed to swell rather than sink, and I saw more than one pale-lipped officer climbing into his saddle that he might be able to fly, if necessary.

The issue agreed with my expectations. The heart of the disorder lay in a part of the camp separated from our quarters by a brook, but near enough in point of distance, so that we saw, my lady and all, pretty clearly what followed. For a moment, for a few seconds, during which you could hear a pin drop through the camp, the general stood, his life in the balance, unarmed in the midst of armed men. But he had that set courage which seems to daunt the common sort and

paralyse the finger on the trigger; and he prevailed. The knaves lowered their weapons and shrank back cowering before him. In a twinkling the fires were beaten out by a hundred eager feet, and the general strode back to us through the silent, obsequious camp.

He distinguished my lady standing at the door of her tent, and stepped aside. "I am sorry that you have been disturbed, Countess," he said politely. "It shall not occur again. I will hang up a dozen of those hounds to-morrow, and we shall have less barking."

"You are not hurt?" my lady asked, in a voice unlike her own.

He laughed, deigning no answer in words. Then he said, "You have no fire? Camp rules are, of course, not for you. Pray have one lit." And he passed on to his tent.

I had the curiosity to go by it when my lady retired. I found a dozen men, cuirassiers of his own privileged troop, peeping and squinting under the canvas which had been hung round his fire. I joined them and looked, and saw him lying at length, wrapped in his cloak, reading "Cæsar's Campaigns" by the light of the blaze, as if nothing had happened.

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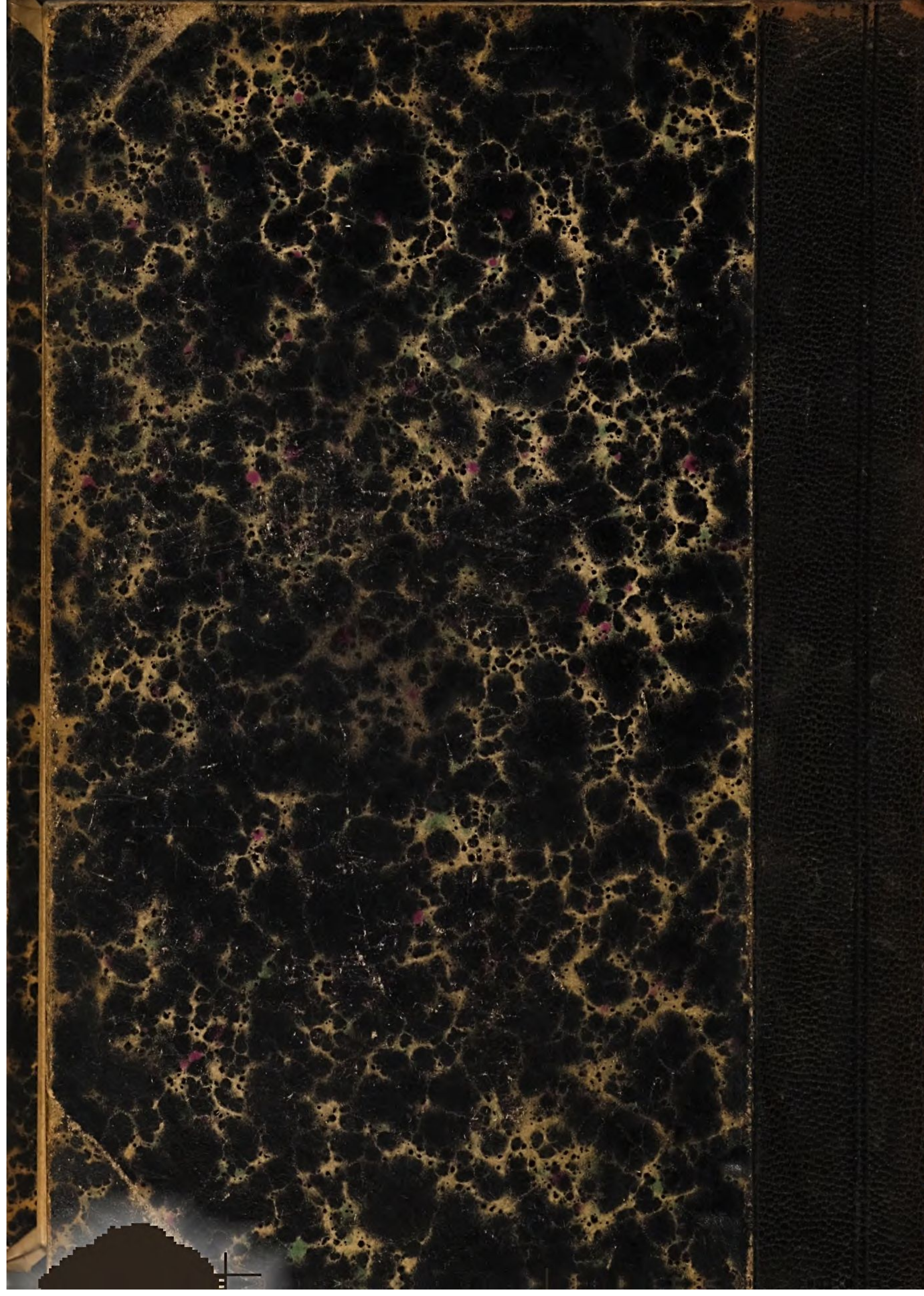
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